ALL ORIGINAL GIANT HORROR ANNUAL!

PSYCHO'S SUPERNATURAL SERIES:

THE HORNED GOAT OF SATAN

THE BAPHOMET IDOL IS SAID TO REPRESENT THE MAGICAL FORM OF **ABSOLUTE.** IT HAS THE HEAD AND HOOVES OF A **GOAT,** WITH A THICK BLACK CANDLE SET BETWEEN THE TWO ENORMOUS LONG HORNS; AND **HUMAN HANDS,** AND A SCALE-LIKE **BELLY!** IT WEARS A LONG ROBE ATTACHED AT ITS WAIST, AND HAS UPON ITS GROTESQUE BACK AN EVIL PAIR OF FEATHERED **WINGS!**

THE **HORNED GOAT OF SATAN** IS SAID TO REPRESENT LUCIFER HIMSELF ON VISITS TO EARTH, AND AT UNHOLY MEETINGS OF THE DREADED CULT OF **SATANISTS** IS ALWAYS PRESENT A MEMBER OF THE CULT WEARING A MASK AND GARBED AND DISGUISED AS THE MONSTROUS BEAST! THE BIZARRE PENTAGRAM AFFIXED ON ITS **FOREHEAD** IS TO REPRESENT THE BRIDGED GAP BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE WORLD OF HIS MASTER... **HELL!**

. . . Come . . . The darkness will light your way well . . . Enter this place that now is horror, breathing, breading, horribly seething, hideously waiting, crawling and creeping . . . within this house of haunting horrors: this earth where and while black beasts sometimes blue and sometimes black beat silent quieted drums that tell of YOU . . . for it is YOU this place welcomes YOU this black-dark mansion greets ever inwardly inviting your presence . . . COME . . . the slithering innards of this place smile for at last you are at the front where things are about to begin. . .

PSYCHO

ANNUAL #1-1972

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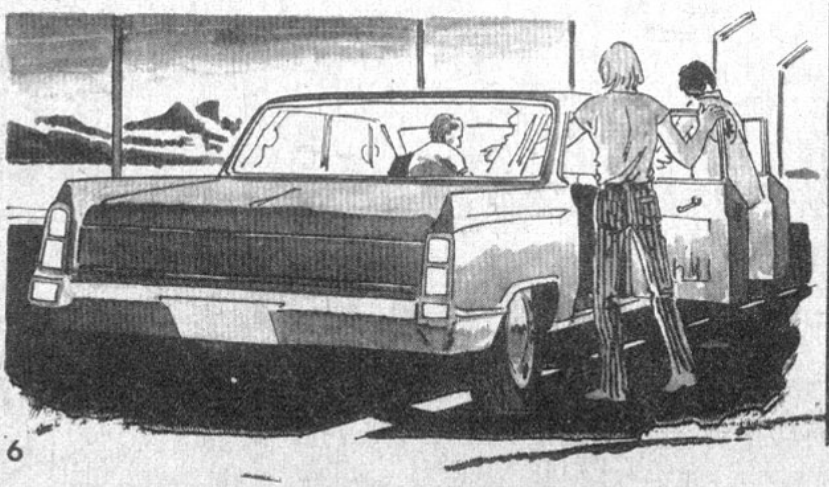
NOW. . . Light the single dull candle by your bed and shift the sheets up to warm your withins. . . for this freak-frought special annual issue will CHILL YOUR BRAIN . . .

CALIFORNIA IN AUGUST. MID-MORNING. AND HOT OUT IN THE SANTA BARBARA SUNLIGHT, WHERE TWO YOUNG MEN WAIT, HOPING THAT SOMEONE WILL GIVE THEM A LIFT...
GET UP, CARY! THIS LOOKS LIKE OUR RIDE OUTTA HERE.
TIME CAN BE BENT. LET'S LOOK THROUGH THE PRISM THAT SEPARATES THE FUTURE FROM THE PRESENT, TO GLIMPSE THE UNKNOWN THAT HINTS OF NIGHTMARE AHEAD FOR THESE HITCH-HIKERS, MAKING THEIR WAY BY THUMB FROM PORTLAND TO SAN DIEGO, A CHIMERIC IMAGE THAT CAN ALMOST BE SEEN, SHIMMERING IN THE HEAT, BEFORE IT IS CARRIED AWAY BY THE SLIGHT BREEZE, TO MAKE WAY FOR THE PRESENT...
SAN DIEGO
LUCIFER AWAITS YOU!
A concocted mind-bender by KRAFT and VILLANOVA

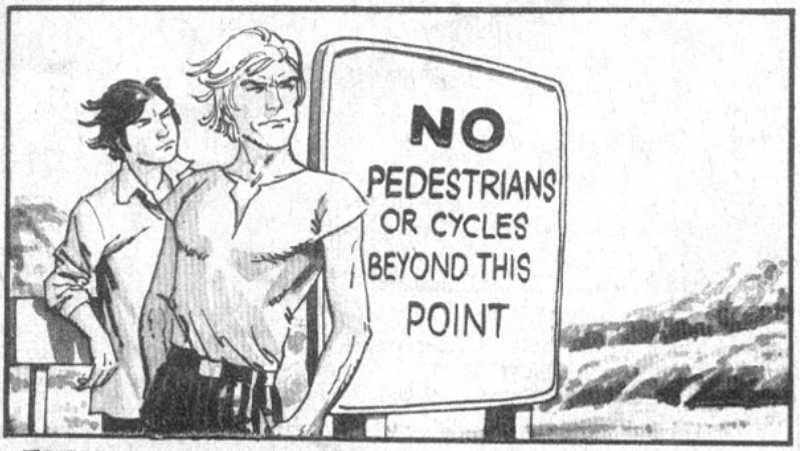
WE'RE ONLY GOING ABOUT A HUNDRED MILES...
FANTASTIC! MITCH AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING ALL MORNING FOR A RIDE -- THERE'RE SO MANY OTHER HITCH-HIKERS THAT NO ONE WANTS TO STOP.
THIS IS MY DAUGHTER, SARA...
AND I'VE A SON WHO USED TO HITCH-HIKE, SO I ALWAYS TRY TO STOP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, IF THEY DON'T LOOK DANGEROUS!
WHAT IF THEY ARE?
I'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED THAT SITUATION --I GUESS I HAVE A LOT OF FAITH IN OTHER PEOPLE...
WHAT ABOUT YOU, SARA?
I'M NOT AS TRUSTING AS MOTHER ...I DON'T THINK I'D HAVE STOPPED...

THERE'S NO REASON TO BE SCARED... NONE AT ALL!
THIS IS WHERE WE TURN OFF THE SOUTH ROUTE. SINCE YOU CAN'T HITCH ON THE FREEWAY, YOU'LL WANT TO BE NEAR AN ENTRANCE RAMP...
IS IT ALL RIGHT IF I LET YOU OUT HERE?
UH... YEAH... THANKS FOR THE RIDE.
LET'S GET OVER TO THE "ON" RAMP. MAYBE WE'LL GET ANOTHER RIDE, BEFORE THE SUN FRIES US.
IF I'D BEEN A LITTLE QUICKER, WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THUMBING A LIFT NOW!

... AND, FINALLY, NEAR DUSK, YOU SUCCEED IN SNARING A RIDE!



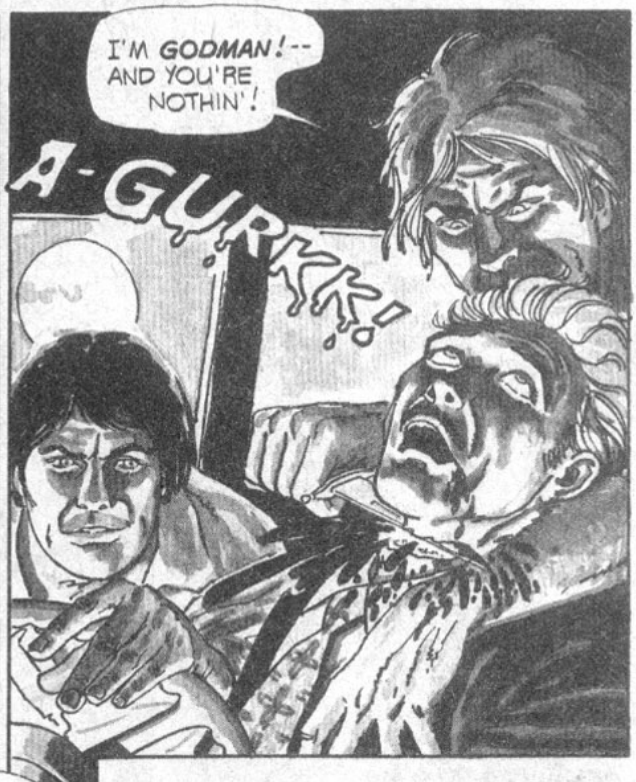
THE HEAT OF DAY IS COMING TO A CLIMAX, AND BOTH OF YOU FEEL THE STIR OF SMALL BREEZES THAT WILL CARRY AWAY THE STIFLING HOTNESS. BUT CAN YOU SENSE THE PRESENCE OF ***DARK DESTINY,*** THAT HOVERS OVER YOU ON INVISIBLE ***NIGHTWINGS,*** DANGLING THE ***SWORD OF RHIANNON*** BY A SLENDER THREAD?



TO PASS THE TIME, YOU READ GRAFFITTI LEFT BEHIND BY OTHER ELUSIVE TRAVELERS OF THE ROAD... AND YOU TALK...

MY NAME IS CHUCK McKLELLYN -- I'M A PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE NEWS MAGAZINES, AND I TRAVEL AROUND PRETTY MUCH AS I PLEASE, PHONING THE EDITORS FOR MY ASSIGNMENTS.
IT WOULD BE NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYONE TO TRACE ME.
AMAZING! AND YOU'VE NEVER --UH-- RAN INTO ANY TROUBLE ALONE?

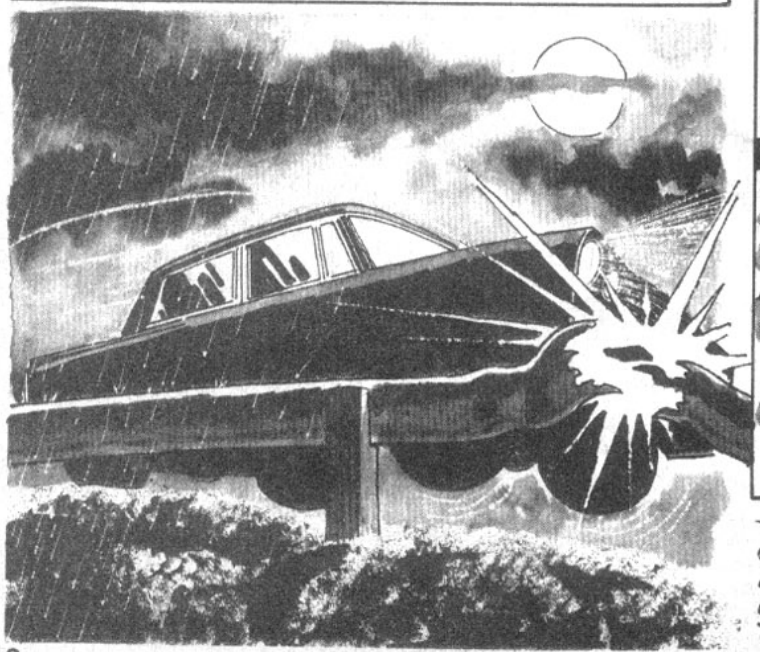
THE ROGUE MOON RISES AS KILL-LUST STEALS OVER YOU, MITCH; AND IN THEIR HIDDEN RETREAT THE MIDNIGHT DANCERS WEAVE THEIR WEB OF HORROR...



THE MOON OF SKULLS ILLUMES YOU IN COLD LIGHT AS, BY FURIES POSSESSED, YOU SHRED CHUCK McKLELLYN'S FLESH.

THIS SCENE IS FOR YOUR EYES ONLY, AS A NEBULOUS HINT OF DESTINY FLITS BRIEFLY ACROSS THE STOIC MOON...!

THE WARNING COMES TOO LATE, AND AS THE CAR SKIDS OUT OF CONTROL, THE MOON EMERGES FROM BEHIND RAIN-CLOUDS, IMPASSIVE, TO WITNESS DESTINY'S WORKINGS...



AS IF IN GRIM RETRIBUTION, THE RAIN BEGINS TO FALL--AND WAS THAT A BREATH OF THE ***WINDS OF DARKOVER*** THAT YOU FELT, MITCH, AS YOU OPENED THE DOOR TO DISPOSE OF THE CORPSE?

THE BLOOD ON YOUR ARMS AND THE CAR SEAT IS WARM, STICKY, AND YOU SUDDENLY GROW CHILLED IN ITS EMBRACE! THE SWEET, CLOYING SCENT DISTURBS YOU... AND THE CAR IS MOVING TOO FAST ON THE SLICK WET FREEWAY!

THE SICKENING LURCH AS THE CAR PLUNGES INTO THE AIR... THE HARDNESS IN YOUR STOMACH... AND THE BREATH RATTLING IN YOUR THROAT TELL YOU THAT THERE WILL BE NO ARRIVAL IN SAN DIEGO FOR EITHER OF YOU... EXCEPT, PERHAPS, IN THE MORGUE!

THE PAIN AND THE DARKNESS ARE SIMULTANEOUS, AND THE CRASH AND EXPLOSION OF IMPACT FADE IN YOUR EARS... IT'S ***DARKER THAN YOU THINK,*** AND YOU SEEM TO FLOAT ON THE ***EDGE OF TIME,*** AS YOUR LIFE-FORCE TREADS ***THE PATHLESS TRAIL*** OF ***THE SPIRIT...***

!? oo WHERE ARE WE? IS THIS...?
...I THINK WE'RE DEAD!
REALIZATION COMES ABRUPTLY AS YOU WAIT THERE IN THE GLOOM, BEYOND THE GATES OF DREAM, LETTING THE DUST OF DEATH SIFT THROUGH YOUR FINGERS...
THIS IS NO ASTOUNDING DELUSION OF YOUR MIND, NO DRUG TRIP... THIS IS THE REAL THING!
YOU'RE DEAD!
THE DARK PIPER THAT STIRRED YOUR BLOOD-LUST NO LONGER MAKES MUSIC WITHIN YOUR HEAD, MITCH... YOUR EARS RING IN THE SILENCE... AND NO UNEARTHLY ANTHEM PLAYS!
LOOK! DOWN THERE... SEE IT?!
IT'S SO FAR AWAY... COULD IT BE A TUNNEL OPENING?
LISTEN -- IT SOUNDS LIKE A CAR! AND THERE ARE THE HEADLIGHTS!
MAYBE WE CAN HITCH A RIDE...
WHO ARE YOU...
...AND WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I AM NOJ NAMREMMIZ!
WHO?
THE MASTER OF THE DARK GATE-- AND SERVANT OF SATAN, THE LORD OF BLOOD!! AWAITS YOU, AMID HIS SHADOW PEOPLE...!
FOR THE FINAL TIME, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, CARY? REMEMBER YOUR COMPLAINT ABOUT THE SUN? YOU'D GIVE ANYTHING TO BASK IN ITS LIGHT, NOW, WOULDN'T YOU... EVEN IN ITS HEAT, WHICH IS AS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT WAITS FOR YOU AND MITCH ... FOREVER... IN HELL!!
THE END

THE FOUL **STENCH** OF ROTTING GARBAGE PERMEATED THE CORRIDORS... AN **ICY** DECEMBER WIND SCREAMED THROUGH THE HALLWAYS, ENTERING THE BUILDING THROUGH BROKEN WINDOW-PANES AND CHILLING ALL OF ITS INHABITANTS. ON THE 3RD FLOOR, A LIGHTBULB HAD BURNED OUT MORE THAN A MONTH AGO, LEAVING THE LANDING IN TOTAL DARKNESS. YET, FROM THE BLACK STAIRWELL, A HAPPY, SOFT VOICE **SANG** A CHILDHOOD RHYME.

PAT A CAKE, PAT A CAKE, BACKER'S MAN; BAKE ME A CAKE AS FAST AS YOU CAN.

PAT IT AND PRICK IT AND MARK IT WITH **T** AND PUT IT IN THE OVEN FOR--

OOOOOHHHH!

CHOMP!

MAMA! MAMA! PLEASE HELP ME!

GOOD HEAVENS! WHAT IS IT, DEAR? WHAT'S **WRONG?**

BURN, BABY, BURN

OH MY GOOD GOD! **THAT RAT...** IT GOT YOU SOMETHING **AWFUL!**

MAMA **IT HURTS!** IT HURTS **SO BAD!**

FOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE YOUNG GIRL'S TRAGIC ATTACK, SHE WAS THE MAIN TOPIC OF CONVERSATION. BUT BEFORE LONG, THE TENANTS FORGOT THEIR NEIGHBOR'S ORDEAL AND WERE AGAIN EMERGED IN THEIR OWN PROBLEMS.
LOOK, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH MR. GRIFFIN FOR MORE THAN A WEEK. THE STOVE ISN'T WORKING PROPERLY... HUH? CERTAINLY, I PAY MY RENT ON TIME!!
DOESN'T MR. GRIFFIN CARE ABOUT ANY OF HIS TENANTS? WHAT KIND OF A MAN IS HE, ANYWAY?
HE NEVER COMES TO THE PHONE. ALL I DO IS TALK TO ONE OF HIS GIRLS WHEN I CALL HIS OFFICE.
IF I CAN FIND A BETTER JOB SOON, WE'LL BE ABLE TO MOVE OUT OF THIS DUMP, DARLING!
I'M HEADING OUT TO CHECK UP ON SEVERAL JOBS. THERE'S A COUPLE OF PROMISING ONES IN THIS MORNING'S PAPER.
CALL ME IF SOMETHING COMES THROUGH, HONEY. I'LL BE IN ALL DAY... IT'S TOO COLD TO GO OUT WITH THE BABY.
OH, NO, I'M OUT OF MILK FOR THE BABY. I'D BETTER RUN DOWN FOR TEN MINUTES!
JIM WOULD BE FURIOUS IF HE KNEW I'D LEFT THE BABY ALONE... BUT I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!
I WAS GONE OVER A HALF HOUR... THAT CHECK-OUT LINE NEVER MOVED. UH-OH, WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?
IT'S... IT'S LITTLE JIMMY! OH MY GOD!

Not all griffins can fly, cry LEN BROWN and CARLOS GARZON

THE PAIN OF SEEING HER DEAD CHILD WAS TOO MUCH FOR MRS. CARTER.
GIVE ME BACK MY BABY! YOU CAN'T TAKE HIM AWAY FROM ME! GIVE HIM BACK!
SOB! SOB!
MA'AM, YOUR SON IS DEAD! THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR HIM NOW! I'M VERY SORRY!
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE KID?
A FIREMAN SAID THEY HAD A GAS LEAK! WITH HIS TINY LUNGS, IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG BEFORE THE FUMES DID HIM IN!
OH DEAR! MRS. CATER TOLD ME SHE WAS HAVING TROUBLE WITH HER STOVE LAST WEEK...ONLY SHE COULDN'T GET MR. GRIFFIN TO SEND ANYONE OVER TO TAKE CARE OF IT!
YOU HEAR THAT? THAT KID'S DEAD BECAUSE OF GRIFFIN! IN MY BOOK THAT MAKES HIM A MURDERER!
YEAH!
YOU'RE RIGHT, MAN!
HOW MUCH MORE ARE WE GONNA TAKE FROM THAT CREEP? NOTHING IS RIGHT ABOUT THIS PLACE! THAT INCINERATOR HASN'T WORKED FOR A YEAR! I'M TIRED OF LIVING WITH THE STINK OF GARBAGE!
MEET MR. GEORGE GRIFFIN... PROFESSIONAL SLUMLORD! IT WAS THE FIRST OF THE MONTH AND HE WAS PAYING HIS REGULAR VISIT TO THE BUILDING TO PICK UP HIS RENT CHECKS.
JEEZ, I SHOULD HAVE PUT--? BELCH!-- SOME MORE MUSTARD ON THIS!
OH CERTAINLY, MR. GRIFFIN! WHY DON'T YOU COME IN AND I'LL GET IT.
LET'S SEE, WASLEWSKI...HAVE YOU GOT YOUR $72.50 FOR THIS MONTH? I'M TIRED OF WAITING TILL THE 3RD OR 4TH OF THE MONTH TILL YOU COME ACROSS.

CAN I GET YOU A COLD BEER, MR. GRIFFIN?
A BEER? YEAH! YEAH! I'D LIKE A BEER!
UH, YOU DO HAVE THAT $72.50, DON'T YOU, WASLEWSKI?
YOU NEVER COME TO THE PHONE WHEN ANYONE CALLS! WE THOUGHT WE'D BE ABLE TO TALK TO YOU NOW!
MR. GRIFFIN, YOU NEVER SENT THE EXTERMINATOR I REQUESTED! EVEN AFTER I TOLD YOU HOW MY LITTLE JANIE WAS BITTEN BY A RAT!
HEY, WHAT ARE ALL OF YOU DOING IN HERE?
WELL, I...UH, HMM... I GUESS THAT'S OKAY!
WELL, WE'VE DECIDED WE WANT YOU TO INSPECT OUR REPAIRS. FIRST HAND! JUST TO BE SURE YOU'RE SATISFIED!
HEY, YOU GUYS FIX WHAT YOU WANT. BUT I GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE!
OH, NO! WE'VE GOT A NICE LITTLE BASEMENT APARTMENT FOR YOU...DOWN IN THE CELLAR!
SO WE'VE FIXED UP A PLACE FOR YOU TO STAY, UNTIL WE'VE FINISHED!
AFTER ALL, WE'VE GOT LOTS OF WORK TO DO. WE WOULDN'T WANT THE BANGING TO DISTURB YOU.

AND TRUE TO THEIR WORD, THE TENANTS BEGAN THE MANY REPAIRS. FROM THE HALLWAYS...
TO THE FURNACE!
TO THE ROOFTOP...
AT LEAST THE RAIN WON'T LEAK IN ON THE TOP FLOOR APARTMENTS ANYMORE!
CLEARING OUT THAT INCINERATOR CHUTE WAS SOME PROJECT. WALLY AND I SPENT THREE DAYS DOING IT.
WHAT A PLEASURE IT'LL BE NOT TO SMELL THE ROTTING GARBAGE!
THEY'RE NUTS... ALL OF THEM. THINKING THEY CAN KEEP ME LOCKED UP IN HERE.
HARDLY GIVING ME ENOUGH FOOD TO KEEP ME ALIVE. JUST WAIT TILL I GET OUT I'LL HAVE 'EM ALL THROWN OUT ONTO THE STREET!
AND ALL THE WHILE, MR. GRIFFIN SITS AND STEWS...
SOUNDS LIKE THE EAGER BEAVERS ARE WORKING ON THE FURNACE. WELL, AT LEAST I'LL GET SOME REPAIRS OUT OF ALL THIS. AND THEY CERTAINLY CAN'T SEND ME A BILL! HA, HA, HA!
WHO'S THERE? JESUS CHRIST, IT'S SO BRIGHT I CAN'T SEE A DAMNED THING!
MR. GRIFFIN, WE'VE FINISHED OUR WORK. WE'D LIKE YOU TO INSPECT THE PLACE AND MAKE SURE YOU'RE SATISFIED.
NONE OF YOU ARE GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THIS, YOU KNOW. I'LL SEE THAT YOU ALL... HEY, THAT'S A PRETTY FAIR PAINT JOB!
AND NICE WORK ON THIS, TOO!!
WE'RE GLAD YOU LIKE IT, MR. GRIFFIN! BUT WAIT'LL YOU SEE WHAT ELSE WE'VE DONE!

THE TOUR OF THE BUILDING LEADS MR. GRIFFIN TO THE TOP FLOOR...
IT'S GOING TO BE REAL TOUGH--PUFF--TO HAVE YOU ALL THROWN OUT INTO THE STREETS. BUT I'LL REMEMBER HOW YOU ALL PITCHED IN!
BUT WAIT, MR. GRIFFIN. YOU'VE GOT TO SEE HOW WE CLEANED OUT THE INCINERATOR. MR. CARTER SPENT SEVERAL DAYS WORKING ON IT!
REMEMBER HOW THE TENANTS COMPLAINED THAT THE GARBAGE WOULD CLOG UP THE SHUTE? WELL, IT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN.
UH--I'M SURE IT'S FINE. I GET THE IDEA! YOU FIXED IT REAL GOOD!
HIS TENANTS MAKE SURE THAT MR. GRIFFIN CHECKS OUT THEIR INCINERATOR REPAIRS FIRST-HAND...
WELL, MR. GRIFFIN, BE SURE TO LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!
NOOOOOOO
YEOOWOWOWO
THEY NEVER DID FIND OUT WHAT THE SLUM-LORD THOUGHT OF IT!
THE END

IT IS SOMEWHERE OFF THE COAST OF CAPE COD... THE HEAP HAS WALKED DAYS... WEEKS...TO HIM TIME IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE...
THIS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY... ONCE UPON A TIME I WOULD HAVE ENJOYED IT...
...SWIMMING OR FISHING WITH MY WOMAN... LAURIE...
NOW I KNOW ONLY MISERY...
DEEP IN THOUGHT THE HEAP STUMBLES ON THE JAGGED ROCKS AND FALLS TO THE GROUND...HE IS NOT HURT... HOW CAN A HEAP GET HURT?...
UUUGGGGHHH
WHAT'S THIS UGLY MUCK COVERING THE ROCKS...SOME KIND OF SLIME...
BUT SLIME IS INANIMATE HEAP...WHILE THE THING THAT NOW GRABS YOU FROM BEHIND IS NOT...
UUUGHHH!
MY THROAT... SOMETHING CHOKING ME!
HOLY GOD!
...CRAWLING OUT OF THE OCEAN... IT'S STRENGTH...
...IS OVERWHELMING!
YOU MAY THINK YOURSELF SAFE WITHIN YOUR BULK HEAP... BUT IN A MOMENT YOU'LL MEET YOUR MOST TERRIFYING FOE IN THE CHALLENGE OF TERROR CALLED...
THE HEAP
WHAT HATH HELL WROUGHT?

An adventure in stumbling horror with the unusual-usual man-thing by AL HEWETSON and PABLO MARCOS

NOW AS THE UNNAMEABLE THING FROM DAVEY JONES' LOCKER SMASHES YOU TO THE GROUND YOU BEGIN TO REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE UP AGAINST... DON'T YOU, HEAP... SLOWLY IT SINKS INTO YOUR THICK SKULL...
UUUUGGGHHH
ALMOST LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS... BLACKING OUT...
...MUST FIGHT TO KEEP MY MIND GOING... IF I BLACK-OUT NOW I'M FINISHED!
UGGGGHHHHH!
...CAN'T FIGHT IT... TOO HUGE...CAN'T KEEP MY MIND GOING...CAN'T CONCENTRATE... CAN'T EVEN SEE ANYMORE!
CAN'T FIGHT IT... JUST CAN'T...TOO MUCH FOR ME...
...FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIS MONSTROUS FORM AS THE HEAP...
I'M FORCED TO FLEE...
...RUN FOR MY VERY LIFE...
MUST FLEE... CAN'T FIGHT SOMETHING AS MONSTROUS AS THAT...AND WHAT'S THE POINT ANYWAY...
...WHO KNOWS WHAT KIND OF MIND IT MIGHT HAVE...IT MIGHT ONCE HAVE BEEN MAN LIKE ME...
...ALTHOUGH MORE LIKELY IT'S ONLY A WEIRD FREAK OF NATURE...AN ACCIDENT ...A MUTANT SPAWNED OF SOME UNHOLY TWIST OF FATE...

COLLECT YOUR THOUGHTS, HEAP... YOU THAT WERE ONCE A MAN... COLLECT THEM AND ORGANIZE THEM INTO A COLLECTION OF REASONS FOR TURNING COWARD...
IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM...
...I ONLY STUMBLED ACROSS THE CREATURE BY ACCIDENT...IF ANYONE HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT IT'S THE LAW!
NOT ME...
THAT VILLAGE BELOW...IF THE THING GETS ANYWHERE NEAR IT THERE WILL BE ABSOLUTE CHAOS...
...BUT WHAT CAN I DO... NOTHING...I COULDN'T DEFEAT THE THING EVEN IF I WANTED TO...
...I HAD TO RUN FROM IT JUST TO SAVE MY OWN LIFE...
GOOD LORD!
DADDY... WHAT IS IT?...
NEVER MIND THE QUESTIONS JUST RUN, BOY...JUST RUN...
THEY RUN AT THE VERY SIGHT OF ME... JUST AS I RAN FROM THE SLITHERING SEA CREATURE...
IF IT GETS HOLD OF US ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THE WORLD WON'T HELP US...
I CAN HEAR THE THING COMING UP THE CLIFF... SLIDING UP... DRAGGING ITSELF UP...
...BUT IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM...

OKAY HEAP... TURN AROUND NOW TO SEE WHAT CRAWLS OVER THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF BEHIND YOU...
...YOU STILL WANT TO COP OUT?...
3 OF THEM...
WHAT HELL-WROUGHT KIND OF DEPRAVITY IS BEHIND THOSE THINGS...
...THE TOWN WON'T HAVE A CHANCE IN HELL OF SURVIVING THEM...
I CAN'T LET THEM JUST DEVOUR THE TOWN...
...BUT WHAT CAN I DO?
...I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING... I HAVE TO TRY AT LEAST...
I MUST TRY... HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE COULD BE KILLED BEFORE THE AUTHORITIES CAN REACH THIS OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACE...
...I WAS ONCE HUMAN...
...I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE HELPLESS... BUT I ALSO KNOW HOW TO THINK LIKE A HUMAN!
...AND IF I CAN'T DEFEAT THE THINGS BY BRUTE STRENGTH I'LL USE MY HUMAN BRAINS...

SET YOUR MIND-A-WORKIN' HEAP...YOU CLAIM YOU ARE A MAN INSIDE THAT GROTESQUE FORM ...WELL PROVE IT...
THE TREES... I'LL SET THEM ON FIRE...
I'LL BURN THE LIFE OUT OF THE CREATURES...
THE BRUSH-FIRE AIDED BY THE TREES IS FANNING THE FLAMES...
...ENGULFING THE THINGS IN A RING...THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY ESCAPE!
IT'S NOT WORKING ...THEY'RE COMING THROUGH...
...IF FIRE CAN'T STOP THEM WHAT WILL?
THEY'RE SPLITTING UP INTO SMALLER CREATURES.
...MY GOD THEY'RE MULTIPLYING BEFORE MY VERY EYES...
...SPLITTING UP LIKE BASIC ORGANISMS... LIKE AMOEBAS!
THIS IS MY CHANCE...
...IF I CAN DEFEAT THEM NOW... WHILE THEY'RE SMALL AND NOT SO POWERFUL... I MAY BE ABLE TO WIN THIS OUT-MATCHED WAR...
WWWHRAACKKK

IT'S NOT WORKING EITHER...
...POINTLESS...THE SLIME JUST COLLECTS... GATHERS...PULLS TOGETHER AGAIN INTO AN EVEN BIGGER MASS...
YOU HAVE MORE THAN ONE PROBLEM AT THE MOMENT HEAP...LIKE THE ONE CREEPING UP BEHIND YOU...
UGGGHHH!
...GRABBED ME FROM BEHIND...IF I DON'T BREAK FREE IT MIGHT SMASH ME AGAINST THE TREES...
...IF I HAVE ANY MORE TREATMENT LIKE I GOT A FEW MINUTES AGO I'VE HAD IT...
...AND SO HAS THE VILLAGE...
EEEEAAUUGGH!
THE PAIN...CAN'T ENDURE THE PAIN...
SO STRANGE TO KNOW PHYSICAL TORTURE AS THE HEAP...
IT'S MOVED ON...RIGHT OVER ME... LIKE IT'S GOT NO MIND OF IT'S OWN...
...THEY'RE ALL FOLLOWING THE LEADER...LIKE SHEEP!
THEY'RE ALL FOLLOWING THE THING THAT CAME OUT OF THE SEA FIRST...
...MUST GET IT AWAY FROM THE TOWN...IF I CAN LURE IT AWAY THE OTHERS MIGHT FOLLOW...
LURE? HOW CAN I LURE! THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY...
...TO DRAG IT...

IT'S WORKING... THE OTHERS ARE FOLLOWING...
...BUT THE STRENGTH... THE WEIGHT...IT'S LIKE PULLING AN OCEAN LINER...
...EVEN THE HEAP IS ONLY SO STRONG...
PERHAPS... FRIEND...BUT FOR A MAN WHO WAS A COWARD A FEW MINUTES AGO YOU'VE PROVEN YOU HAVE A GOOD POWERFUL GUT-LOAD OF SPIRIT...
WATER SUFFOCATING ...CHOKING MY LUNGS...
...I'M RESOLVED TO DIE...IN SAVING THE VILLAGE I'VE CUT MY OWN THROAT...
THERE AIN'T A CHANCE I'M GONNA GET OUT OF THIS ONE ALIVE...ONCE THEY SURROUND ME I'VE HAD IT...
THEY'RE DISINTEGRATING... BREAKING UP INTO MUCK COATING THE WATER...TURNING BACK INTO SLIME...
...AN' I'M STILL ALIVE... IT'S A MIRACLE...
BUT WHAT WERE THEY? IF THERE'S ONE PLACE IN THE WORLD SHROUDED IN MYSTERY AND THE SUPERNATURAL IT'S NEW ENGLAND...BUT THESE CREATURES ARE BEYOND ALL HUMAN REASON...
...WELL PERHAPS NOT SO MUCH...WHEN I LOOK AT MYSELF I AM UNEXPLAINED...
...WHY SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT EXPLAINING THEM...
...WHEN I CAN'T EVEN EXPLAIN MYSELF...
BY WAY OF AN INCIDENTAL EPILOGUE...LET US TURN FOR A MOMENT TO A SINGLE SCENE ABOUT A MILE AWAY...IN THE TINY COASTAL VILLAGE OF PINE BLUFF...
LOCK YOUR DOORS ...IF THAT BEAST EVER GETS NEAR TOWN HE'LL MURDER US ALL... WE ONLY ESCAPED BECAUSE WE CAUGHT HIM BY SURPRISE...
HE WAS HORRIBLE... UGLY WITH SCARS AND MUD COVERING HIS BODY... HE WAS INHUMAN...
SO ENDS OUR HEAP TALE OF THE UNUSUAL...ON RATHER A SAD, IRONIC NOTE... DON'T YOU THINK? IT IS FORTUNATE INDEED THAT THE "HORRIBLE INHUMAN" HEAP OF WHOM THE CHILD TALKS IS NOT PRESENT... FOR IF HE WAS...
...HE MIGHT WONDER WHY HE EVEN BOTHERED TO TRY...

MANY YEARS AGO AUTHOR **BRAM STOKER** WAS FIRST TO WRITE THE CHRONICLES OF THE STRANGE-UNDEAD VAMPIRE **DRACULA**...AND MORE RECENTLY MANY MOTION PICTURES HAVE BEEN RELEASED DEPICTING STARS **BELA LUGOSI** AND **CHRISTOPHER LEE** AS THE BLOOD-FIEND WHO STALKED BY NIGHT! THESE TALES WERE CONSIDERED **PURE FICTION**--NOW IT SEEMS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT BE...IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THE MADMAN **STOKER** WROTE OF WAS BASED ON THE LIFE OF A **REAL MAN**... AND SO STARTS OUR TALE...***THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MYTH OF DRACULA!***

THE MYTH OF DRACULA

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A **SHOCK**...FOR THE TALE YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ IS A DOCUMENT OF **TRUTH**... NOW... FOR THE MOST INCREDIBLE **TRUE** TALE YOU WILL EVER **READ**...

IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT DISCOVERY, HISTORIANS ARE BEGINNING TO THINK THAT ***BRAM STOKER*** HAD SOMEONE IN MIND WHEN HE CREATED THE FIENDISH VAMPIRE ***DRACULA***... AND THAT THE BLOOD FIEND WAS NOT SIMPLY A CONCOCTION OF HIS IMAGINATION!

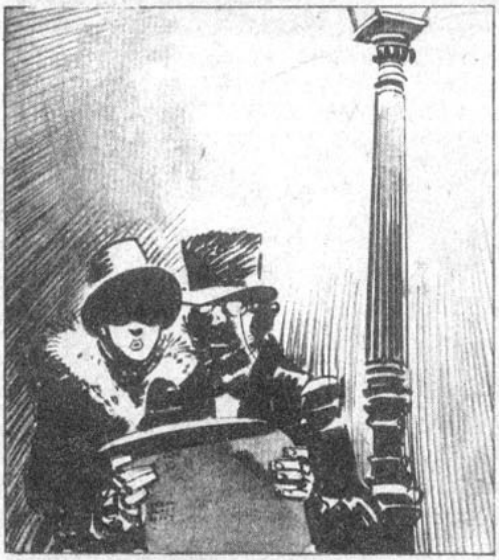
OUR TRUE TALE STARTS IN 1431 IN THE COUNTRY OF ***WALLACHIA***...NOW ***RUMANIA***. KING SIGISMUND OF THE SOVEREIGN COUNTRY ***HUNGARY*** CROWNED A YOUNG MEMBER OF HIS COURT AS RULER OF WALLACHIA...HIS NAME WAS TO BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH ***CRUELTY...VLAD III***

WITH THE TITLE OF ***VOIVODE***, VLAD RETURNED TO HIS HOMELAND AND NEW KINGDOM TO RULE VICIOUSLY AND MERCILESSLY! HIS PEASANT SUBJECTS WERE GIVEN ENORMOUS TAXES AND TARIFFS WHICH THEIR MEAGER EARNINGS COULD NOT MEET...AND THERE GREW AMONG THE PEOPLE A GREAT HATRED FOR VLAD...WHOSE ONLY COMPASSION IN THIS WORLD WAS FOR HIS ***NEWBORN SON!***

HE LAVISHED GREAT AFFECTION UPON HIS SON, AND EDUCATED HIM WELL... IN THE WAYS OF HIS ***EVIL!***

VLAD IV LEARNED HIS LESSONS WELL, AND THERE ARE MANY TALES PASSED DOWN THROUGH HISTORY OF THE TORTURES HE WOULD PERPETRATE ON INNOCENT PEOPLE!

THE TURKS IMMEDIATELY SET UP VLAD IV AS THEIR PUPPET RULER... BUT HIS FATHER'S TRAINING HAD WORKED WELL AND HE PROVED TO BE AS RUTHLESS AND CRUEL AS HIS FATHER HAD BEEN! THE PEASANTS SOON NAMED THEIR NEW MASTER DRACULA... MEANING DRAGON OF EVIL!



THE INFAMY SPREAD FAR AND WIDE... IN GERMANY HE BECAME KNOWN AS DRACOLE, IN VENICE AS DRAGULIA... AND IN HUNGARY AS DRACULA! HIS ILL DEEDS MADE HIM A WORLD RE-KNOWNED LEGEND OF HORROR IN HIS OWN TIME... AND HE WAS THE SHADOWY TALK OF SOCIETY THROUGHOUT EVEN THE UNDERWORLD OF PARIS!

IN WALLACHIA... ALL AUTHORITY WAS HELPLESS... BECAUSE HE WAS THE AUTHORITY... AND ALTHOUGH HE COMMITTED HIS BIZARRE ACTS UNDER COVER OF NIGHT AND IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS CASTLE NO MAN WOULD SERVE HIM... HIS PERSONAL "SLAVES" HAD THEIR TONGUES REMOVED SO THAT THEY MIGHT CARRY NO TALES.

HIS PORTRAIT HANGS NOW IN THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM, AND MANY ACCOUNTS OF HIS BRUTAL LIFE HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED.
ONE SUCH STORY IS RELATED BY A VILLAGE GRAVEYARD KEEPER NEAR THE KING'S CASTLE.
HURRY... DIG THE GRAVES DEEP AND WELL... THEY MUST HOLD THEIR CORPSES WELL... LEST THEIR SPIRITS ARISE TO HAUNT ME!
IT WAS HORRIBLY IMPALED AND MUTILATED, TEETH MARKS WERE VERY VISIBLE AND THE BODY LOOKED HALF EATEN!
"ONE NIGHT" SAYS THE CRYPTKEEPER, "I BECAME VERY CURIOUS AND DUG UP ONE OF THE REMAINS OF WHAT HAD BEEN HIS VICTIM!

AH, EVERETT... SO GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT TONIGHT... JUST A FEW FRIENDS GATHERED FOR SOME SPORT!
IT'S SO RARE THAT WE CAN GET TOGETHER THAT I'VE PLANNED SOMETHING SPECIAL LATER ON...

THEIR WAS ANOTHER STORY... NOT SO OFTEN REPEATED AS THE ONE OF THE GRAVE-KEEPER... FOR IT WAS SO HORRIBLE THAT IT WAS BE WHISPERED IN THE ALLEYS AND GUTTERS OF EUROPE... HOWEVER, IT WAS RE-CORDED BY A WITNESS, A ONE-TIME FRIEND OF VLAD ...IT STARTED AS AN INVITA-TION TO A PARTY...

THE EARLIER PART OF THE EVENING WAS UNEVENTFUL... BUT BEFORE LONG THE STRONG WINE OF VLAD HAD TAKEN ITS COURSE IN OUR VEINS.

VLAD HAD BEEN JITTERY ALL NIGHT... HE PACED THE FLOOR AS IF POS-SESSED BY DEMONS... AND WHEN THE DIS-CUSSION CASUALLY TURNED TO A RECENT UNSOLVED MURDER HE BECAME VERY EXCITED AND INTER-RUPTED THE CONVERSA-TION...

LADIES... I DO HOPE YOU ENJOYED MY WINE... IT'S MY SPECIAL BLEND... GRAPES FROM VINEYARDS OF THE RHINE... AND LOCAL HOME-SPUN BLOOD FROM SOME RECENTLY DEPARTED YOUNG LADIES OF MY COURT... TASTY, DON'T YOU THINK?
NOW COME PLEASE... FOR THE EVENING'S ENTER-TAINMENT IS ABOUT TO BEGIN... IN MY "CHAMBERS" BE-NEATH THE CASTLE!

HE LED US DOWN A NARROW WINDING STAIRCASE TO HIS DUNGEON. IT WAS POPULAR IN THOSE DAYS TO HAVE A HORROR CHAMBER BENEATH ONE'S CASTLE... BUT WE NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE SUCH HORRORS AS THESE...
TONIGHT...WE SHALL HAVE SOME ENJOYMENT... I HAVE HAD MY MEN SCOURING THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR WEEKS IN SEARCH OF A BAND OF GYPSIES FOR OUR LITTLE GAME...

DRACULA FOUND GREAT PLEASURE FROM GIVING US A TOUR OF HIS RACKS...

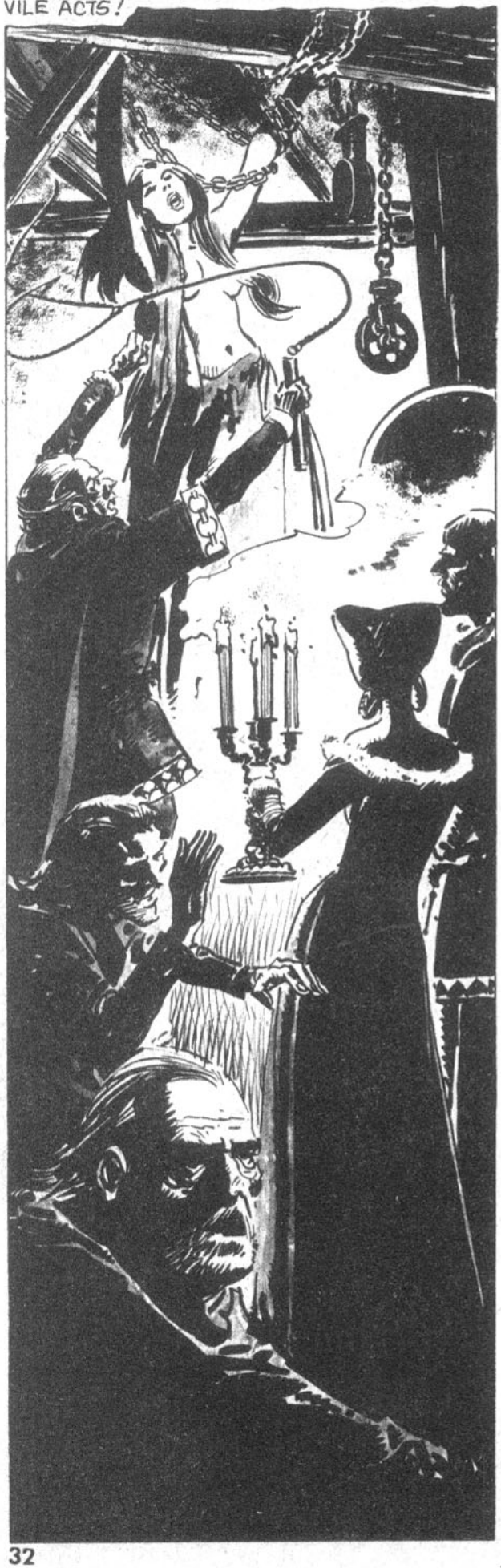
HIS EYES FLASHED AND GLEAMED AS HE PRODDED HIS VICTIM'S NAKED FLESH...

HIS HOUNDS...STARVED FOR WEEKS FOR THIS OCCASION ...RIPPED THE HELPLESS LIMBS FROM THEIR INNO CENT PREY...

I NOTICED THAT THE BLOOD FROM THE VICTIMS WAS CONSERVED IN GIANT VATS WHERE IT DRIPPED...AND OFTEN GUSHED FROM THE NEWLY MANGLED CORPSES...IT HAD BEEN REPORTED TO ME THAT DRACULA OFTEN DRANK THIS ...AND I KNEW FOR A PERSONAL FACT THAT HE FREQUENTLY WASHED AND BATHED IN THE WARM BLOOD OF THE FRESHLY SLAUGHTERED PEASANTS!

SUDDENLY DRACULA IS LOST...HIS MAD CRAVINGS BECOME TOO MUCH FOR HIM...HE ATTACKED ONE OF THE YOUNG GIRLS OF OUR OWN GROUP!
VLAD WAS NOTORIOUS FOR BEING A CANNIBAL... BUT NO MAN IN HIS RIGHT MIND DREAMT HIS DELIGHTS EXTENDED TO LIVE FLESH...

I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING SO GROTESQUE... THE UNFORTUNATE GIRL WAS CHAINED AND WAS SUBJECTED TO THE PERVERTED VLAD'S EVIL AND VILE ACTS!



IN 1462 HE WAS DEPOSED BY THE PASHA OF VIDIN AT THE HEAD OF AN ENORMOUS ARMY! IT IS SAID THAT AS THE TROOPS RODE INTO THE SURROUNDING FOREST TO HIS CASTLE THEY WERE GREETED BY SCORES OF HUMAN HEADS IMPALED ON STAKES!

DRACULA DISAPPEARED AND ESCAPED UNTIL 1475 WHEN HE AGAIN SEIZED CONTROL OF HIS THRONE...AND AGAIN THE HORROR THAT WAS ONCE WALLACHIA'S TOOK MORE INNOCENT LIVES!

HUMANITY WAS FORTUNATE...FOR HE LIVED ONLY ANOTHER YEAR AND DIED IN 1477...HIS WRETCHED BODY GAUNT AND RIDDLED WITH DISEASES CAUSED BY THE DEBAUCHERY OF HIS OWN BODY...

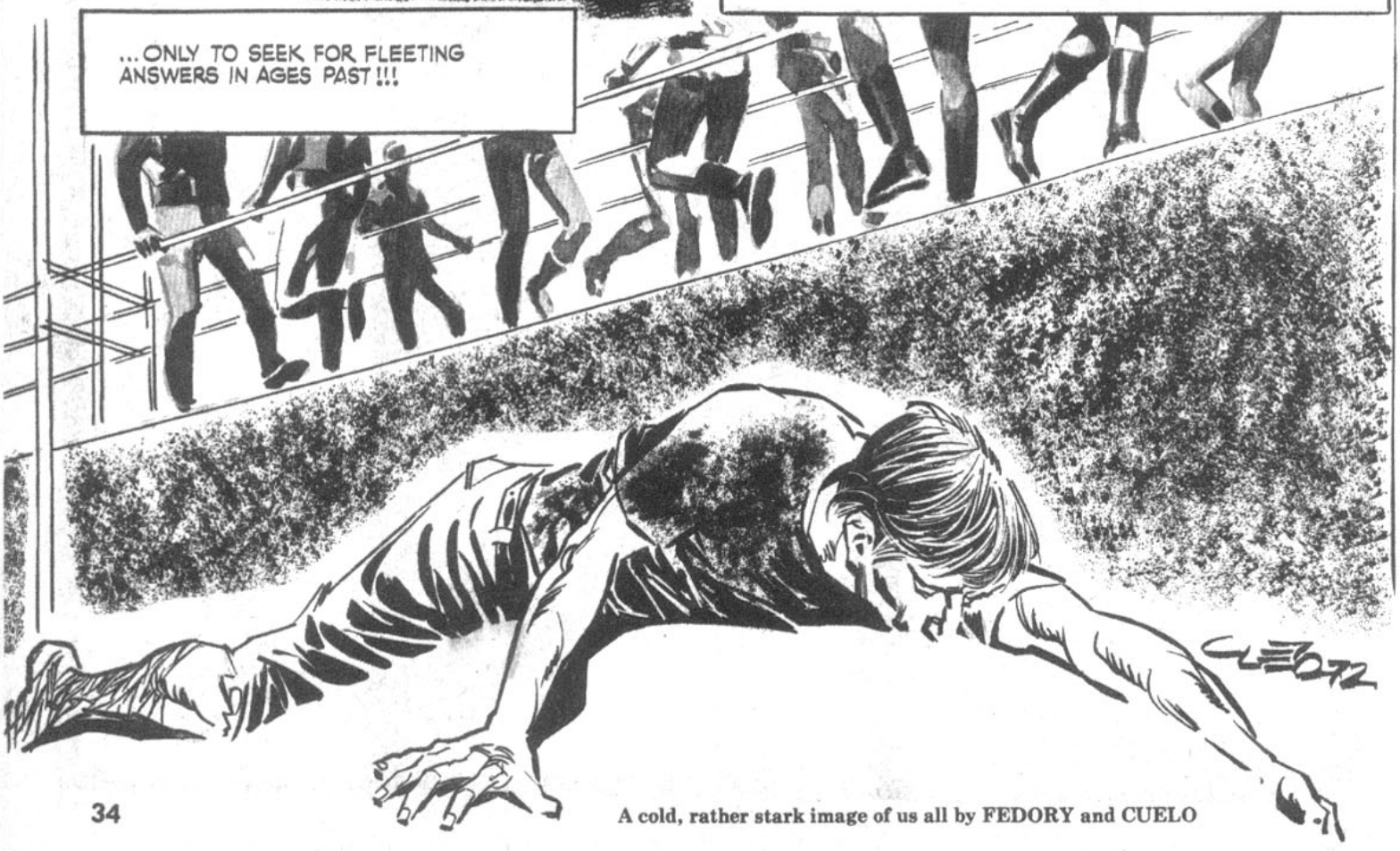
...AND SO DIED ***DRACULA***...IN MISERY AND NERVE-SHATTERING AGONY...AND IN LONELINESS!

THE END

MANY HAVE SOUGHT TO CHANGE THE PAST BY FLEEING TO THE WAITING ARMS OF SOME FUTURE AGE! INDEED, IT IS A GRIM *CHRONICLE*... FOOTNOTED BY...

...BLIND FATE!!!

UPON THIS *ALIEN* BATTLEFIELD PLEAS ARE VOICED, BUT GO UNMARKED, AS AEOLUS TOYS WITH THE SWIRLING SANDS! MYRIAD QUESTIONS PRESS THE DRAINING MIND...
...PLEASE *COUGH COUGH* I NEED YOUR HELP...



A cold, rather stark image of us all by FEDORY and CUELO

SCANT HOURS BEFORE... HOURS THAT HAVE NOW WITNESSED THE PASSAGE OF CENTURIES...
AGAIN!!! DAMN THEM... DAMN THEM ALL!!!
ARE THEY SOULLES... BLIND??! FOR WHAT HELL ON EARTH HAVE THEY LAID THE FOUNDATION?!!
NO LONGER CAN I CLAIM ANY KINSHIP TO THESE ANIMALS CALLED MAN!!
I'LL LEAVE THEM TO THEIR MAGGOT-RIDDLED WORLD!!
MINDLESS, CANCEROUS SLUGS!!!
LONG HAVE I POSTPONED THIS DAY OF DECISION! IF I FAIL, I MUST DESCEND TO THE FETID MUCK OF THIS WRETCHED WORLD... DESCEND TO THE GROTESQUE PITS OF INFINITE DEPRESSION!!!
PRAY GOD, I SHALL NOT FAIL!!
AS THE ARK... THE ROBE OF SANITY IS DONNED...
IN ANY EVENT, I SHALL NOT FAIL TO QUIT THIS WORLD!!!
THE ONCE STILL CELLAR AIR IS TRANSFORMED... RIPPED BY THE DRONING MUSIC OF SECONDS IN FRICTION, AND PEALS OF JOYOUS LAUGHTER BY ONE WHO HAD FORSAKEN MIRTH...
HA HA HA HA HAAAA!!! IT WORKS... IT WORKS!!! HA HA HA HA HAAAAAA!!!!!

MAN AND MACHINE, EACH IN THE OTHERS EMBRACE, ARE THROWN THROUGH TIME! NIGHT AND DAY PASS LIKE THE FLICKERING OF STROBE LIGHTS... A ***BLINDING FLASH*** ARRIVES, AND PASSES LEAVING VISION SOMEWHERE IN THE NAMELESS PAST! THE EYES BEGIN TO FOCUS ONCE AGAIN AS THEY ARE PRESENTED WITH THE GRIM ***LEGACY*** THE FUTURE MUST BEAR...

AHHHH, PURIFICATION BY FIRE!! SO THEY FINALLY DID IT! THEY MUSTERED ENOUGH BLINDNESS AND STUPIDITY FOR ONE FINAL ACT!!!

SECONDS LATER, OR *DECADES* IN THE *FUTURE*...

LIFE!! IT CONTINUES!!

JOOOO

SOON CIVILIZATION MUST MAKE ANOTHER STAGE CALL!!!

WARS... MURDER... RAPE, AND ALL THE WORLD DOES, IS WATCH!! NO ONE HEARS... NONE SEE!!

PARADOX SUPREME...THEY WATCH, YET THEY ARE BLIND!!!

ONLY IN THE FUTURE LIES HOPE!! ONLY IN...

...HUNNH??!

LIKE THE FABLED BIRD, A STRUCTURE RISES FROM THE DECAY OF THE *PAST!*

WHERE ONCE THE DARKNESS OF *SICK* MINDS PREVAILED, NOW RISES A CITADEL OF CRYSTALLINE *PURITY!!*

HOW NOBLE THEY MUST BE!!!

MUST SLOW DOWN GRADUALLY... *GRADUALLY... THERE!!!*

AAAIIIIEEEEEEE!!!!

AS MUSE ENDS, REALITY PREVAILS...

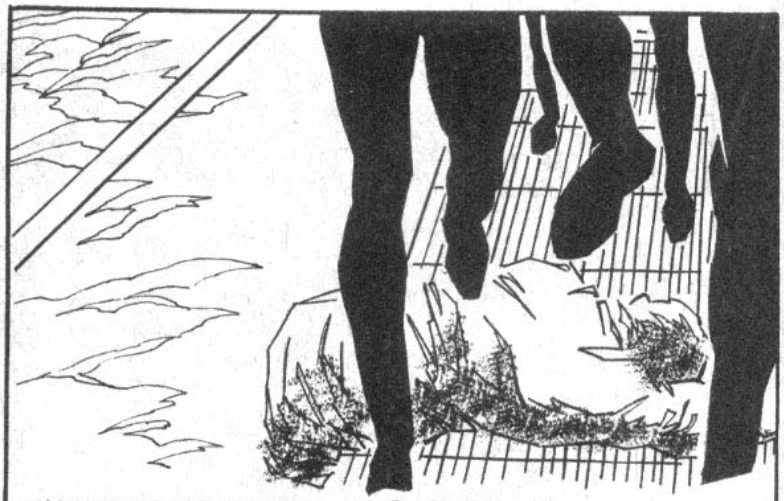
THERE!!! HA HA HAAAA, THEY ARE BUILDING *AGAIN!!!*

AS THE SLIME-BED SUCKS ITS' LATEST VICTIM BENEATH THE DARKENED DEPTHS OF MIASMIC OOZE...
TOO MUCH WEIGHT... SINKING FAST... MUST RID...
UUUNNNNGGHHHH
THAT WAS CLOSE... TOO CLOSE!!!
IT IS THE JUSTICE OF FATE, THAT I SHOULD LIVE TO SEE MY DREAM!!
I'LL SPEAK TO THEM OF THE PAST, AND REVEL IN THE GLORIES POSSESSED BY THE FUTURE...
MEN WILL CALL ME "SAGE", AND FLOCK TO HEAR MY WORDS!!!
YES, AND IT IS WISE WORDS...
...HUNNNH??!!

WHILE SOME WOULD ADDRESS HIM "SAGE", THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD BUT LABEL HIM...
...."HOST"!!
WAAAIIIEEE!!!
OH GOD, HELP ME!!! HELP ME!!! SOMEONE HELP ME... PLEASE!!!
UUUNNNGGGHHHH!!!!
NO... NNOOOOO!! 'MUST KEEP RUNNIN'... CAN'T STOP!! CAN'T STOP!!!!
ALMOST THERE... GET UP, GET UP!!
...HURRY!!!

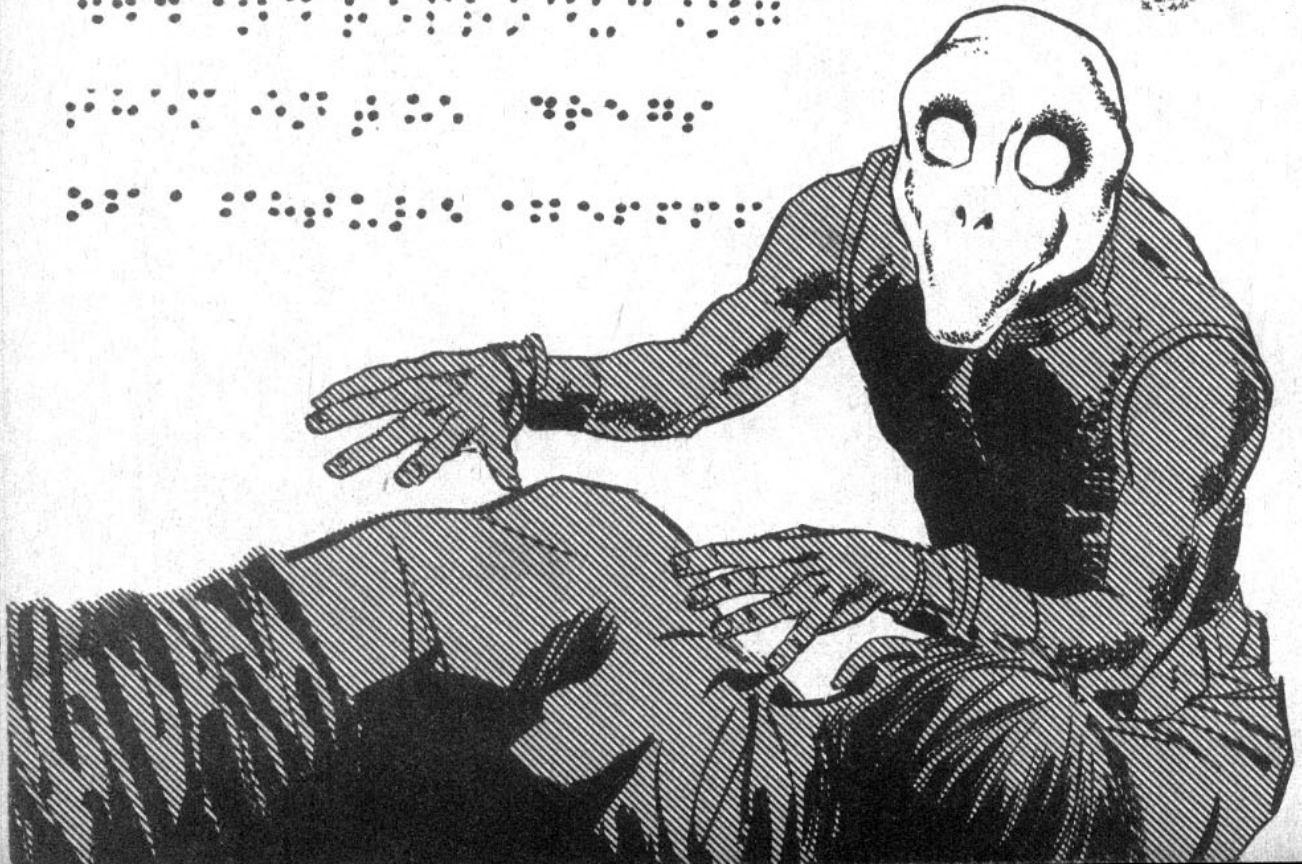
AN ANCIENT SCREAM RIPS THROUGH ANEMIC BRAIN FIBERS, AND IS GIVEN VOICE BY AN AGONIZED MIND! THE BODY HEAVES... DRIED CAPILLARIES CRY... BREATHING IS LABORED, AS IT PASSES THROUGH A COARSE WINDPIPE IN THE GUISE OF A GROTESQUE, HIGH PITCHED WHEEZE!! THE EYES SLOWLY FOCUS, AND THE SOUNDS OF FOOTSTEPS TREADING GRANITE BLOCKS, ASSAULTS THE EARS ABOVE THE POUNDING AND THROBBING OF CONSTRICTING VEINS !!!
AAAIIIEEEEEEEE!!!!!
...CAN'T YOU COUGH HEAR ME? PLEASE ... I NEED YOUR HELP. COUGH
COUGH... PLEASE... NEED HELP... LOSING BLOOD... COUGH COUGH
COUGH... DYING... COUGH COUGH
ARE YOU BLIND?! COUGH COUGH CAN'T YOU HEAR ME?? COUGH
BY GOD, I'LL SEE YOU BURN... COUGH COOOUGGHHHH

ONE DIES, TO GIVE CONSISTENCY TO THE PAST, AND LIVES IN THE PRESENT WITH THE HOPES A GLORIOUS FUTURE!!



MAN WOULD HOPE TO CONTAIN ***DESTINY*** AND ***FATE***, NEVER REALIZING, THAT THESE HOARY SISTERS ARE AS FLEETING AS THE MURMURING WINDS... SCENTED WITH THE JASMIN OF ***ANTIQUITY***...

THEY MOCK MORTALS, AND TOY WITH ***HOPE***... WHILE MULTIPLYING THE ***SINS*** OF THE ***PAST***...



THE CURSING OF CAPTAIN SKULL
ACROSS THE ROLLING SEAS OF THE CARRIBEAN SAILS A SWASHBUCKLING GALLANT OF A BUCCANEER --A SWORDSMAN ADVENTURER WHO USES WITS WITH STEEL TO MAKE HIMSELF MASTER OF THE SPANISH MAIN! HIS NAME IS NED SCULLY, BUT IN HONOR OF HIS FIGHTING PROWESS AND HIS LEGENDARY SUCCESS-- THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE COAST RENAMED HIM--
CAPTAIN SKULL!
AND NOW--AS HE BATTLES FOR HIS LIFE AGAINST HIS MUTINOUS CREW OF CUT-THROATS FROM TORTUGA WHO HAVE TAKEN SERVICE WITH HIM--HE IS ABOUT TO PLUNGE HEAD-LONG INTO THAT FEARSOME LIFE-AND-DEATH STRUGGLE KNOWN AS...
AVAST, YE MUTINOUS DOGS!
BACK BEFORE I SKEWER YOU ON MY STEEL!
IT'S NO USE, CAP'N! I SAY WE HIT THE TOWN FOR THE WOMEN!
YOU SAY WE DON'T-- SO YOU GO OVERBOARD TO FEED THE SHARKS!
HICKMAN

A soul-shrieking cry of fear by GARDNER FOX and STEVE HICKMAN

THE BUCCANEER CAPTAIN DRIVES TO THE ATTACK...
CAPTAIN SKULL WARS ON MEN NOT ON WOMEN!
CURSE YE ALL YE LILLY-LIVERED COWARDS! YE SCUM OF THE SEAS!
SINCE YOU'RE THE RINGLEADER OF THESE APES, I'LL LAY YOU OUT FIRST, WOLF!
WHILE I TEACH THESE OTHERS THAT WHAT THEIR CAPTAIN SAYS-- THEY DO OR DIE!
KRUNNCH!
A LEAP UPWARD INTO THE SHROUDS...
HOTLY PURSUED, HE CLAMBERS HIGH INTO THE RIGGING...
SO I'LL GET UP HERE WHERE YOU CAN ONLY GET ME ONE AT A TIME!
AND NO ONE MAN CAN FACE MY STEEL-- AND LIVE!
IT'S TIME I WAS TEACHING YOU OBEDIANCE, MY LADS, THAT IT IS!
ONCE MORE HE HURTLES THROUGH THE AIR...
BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO DO SOME ATTACKING ON MY OWN!
GUARD YOURSELVES, ME HEARTIES! CAP'N SKULL IS READY TO BEGIN FIGHTING IN EARNEST!

DOWNWARD HE DROPS--LIKE A FALLING STAR--BOOTS KICKING OUT TOPPLING MEN FROM THE SHROUDS...

FAITH! IT'S A NEW GAME OF **BOWLS** I'M AFTER DISCOVERING!

BUT YOU HAVE A LOT **FARTHER** TO FALL THAN ANY TEN-PIN!

CAT-LIKE HE DROPS TO THE MAIN DECK, FENDING OFF CUTLASS AND DAGGER...

OCH, NOW! NO MATTER HOW **MANY** OF YOU I DROP, THERE'S ALWAYS **MORE** OF YOU TO COME AT ME!

HE DOES NOT SEE THE BELAYING PIN IN THE HAND OF A MUTINEER...

BUT **NEVER MIND!** ON CAPTAIN SKULL'S SHIP--**CAPTAIN SKULL RULES!**

THUD!

OVERBOARD WITH HIM! LET THE **SHARKS** FINISH HIM OFF!

AYE! HE CAN'T PULL HIS FANCY STUNTS ON **THEM!**

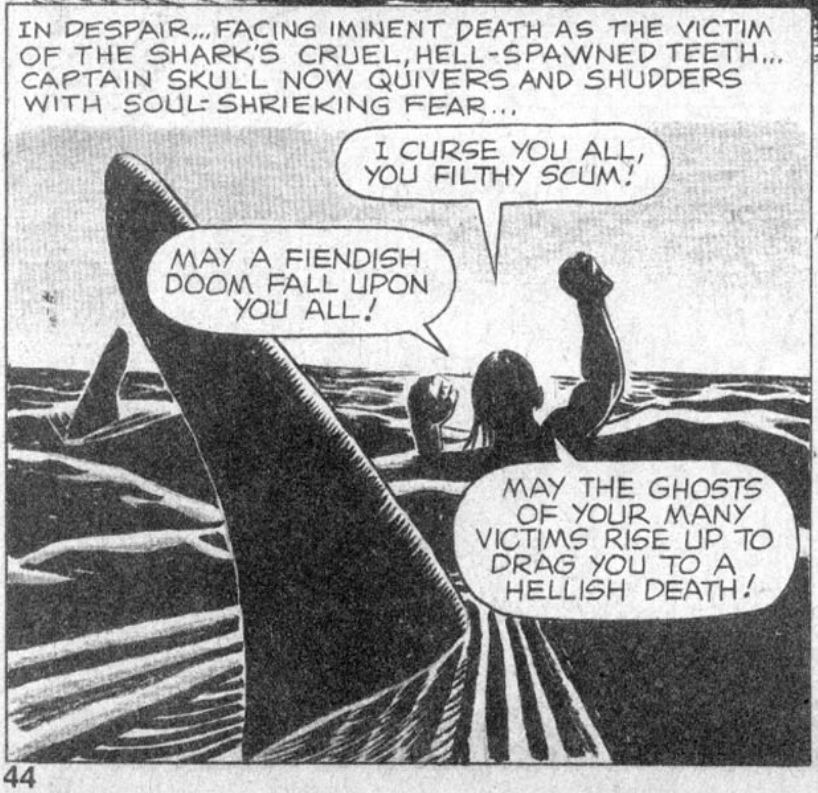
IN MOMENTS, THEIR CAPTAIN IS FLUNG SENSELESS OVER THE RAIL--TO SERVE AS FOOD FOR THE SHARKS BELOW...

GOOD **RIDDANCE** TO HIM!

NOW WE CAN RAID THAT **SETTLEMENT**--AS SOON AS WE **CAREEN** AND **SCRAPE OUR HULL!**

COLD WATER ROUSES THE YOUTHFUL PIRATE CAPTAIN...
;OOOH; WHAT HAPPENED?
OH, YES...THOSE SCURVY DOGS THREW ME INTO THE SEA--
--AND THERE ARE SHARKS ALL AROUND ME!
THEY WON'T ATTACK UNTIL THEY GET HUNGRY--NOT WITHOUT THE SCENT OF BLOOD!
THANK A KIND PROVIDENCE--I WASN'T WOUNDED!
EVEN SO--HOW LONG CAN I HOLD THEM OFF?

THE SUN DIPS INTO THE WEST, AND DUSK FALLS UPON THE SEA...
IT WON'T BE LONG NOW--THE SHARKS ARE GETTING BOLDER!
IT'S JUST ABOUT THEIR--FEEDING TIME!


IN DESPAIR... FACING IMINENT DEATH AS THE VICTIM OF THE SHARK'S CRUEL, HELL-SPAWNED TEETH... CAPTAIN SKULL NOW QUIVERS AND SHUDDERS WITH SOUL-SHRIEKING FEAR...
I CURSE YOU ALL, YOU FILTHY SCUM!
MAY A FIENDISH DOOM FALL UPON YOU ALL!
MAY THE GHOSTS OF YOUR MANY VICTIMS RISE UP TO DRAG YOU TO A HELLISH DEATH!

SOMETHING BUMPS HIM IN THE DARK...
A SHARK!
THEY'RE TIRED OF WAITING AND HAVE COME TO--EAT!

HE WHIRLS TO FIGHT WITH TOOTH AND FIST, BUT--
I'LL NOT BE AN EASY MEAL! I'LL--
WHAT'S THIS?
WHY--IT'S A SHATTERED MAST OFF SOME SUNKEN SHIP!
IN NEAR COLLAPSE, HE FASTENS HANDS TO HIS WOODEN FLOAT...
AT LEAST THE SHARKS CAN'T GET ME ON THIS!
I'LL STAY ALIVE A LITTLE WHILE LONGER!
ALL NIGHT LONG HE SLEEPS AND DREAMS--AND DRIFTS...
IN THE MORNING SUNLIGHT THE CARRIBEAN IS WIDE AND EMPTY--THIRST BECOMES A TORTURE...
I FEEL BAKED--BLISTERED! I'D GIVE A CHEST OF GOLD DUBLOONS FOR A SWIG OF WATER...
THEN--TOWARDS SUNDOWN...
A SAIL!!
BY GOD'S BLOOD! A SHIP COME TO RESCUE ME--BUT WHY DOES SHE WALLOW SO!
SHE YAWS AND PITCHES TO THE WAVES!
AND HER SAILS FLAP IDLY!
AS IF THERE'S NOBODY ABOARD!

PADDLING THE MAST ACROSS THE SEA, HE REACHES THE SHIP-- CLIMBS THE JACOBS LADDER...
GOD...
A GIRL--TIED TO THE MAST!
AND A VERY FORTUNE SCATTERED ON THE DECKPLANKS AT HER FEET!
WHAT KIND OF MYSTERY HAVE I WANDERED INTO?
WHO ARE YOU, LASS? WHAT HAPPENED?
I-- DON'T KNOW. I CAN'T REMEMBER!
WHY--I CAN'T EVEN RECALL MY NAME!
I'LL CALL YOU JOANNA! NOW SEE IF YOU CAN HANDLE THE HELM, GIRL.
A SHIP NEEDS MORE THAN TWO PEOPLE TO SAIL HER PROPERLY-- BUT WE'LL DO WHAT WE CAN!

IN THREE DAYS TIME, FAVORING WINDS CARRY THE LUMBERING MERCHANTMAN TOWARD THE TINY ISLAND OF SAN TOMAS...
I CAN MAKE OUT THE PLACE WHERE I WAS TO CAREEN MY SHIP STORM RIDER. IF LUCK FAVORS US, MY MEN WILL BE THERE!
BUT YOUR MEN MAY SEE US--KILL US BOTH!
NOT SO, GIRL. I HAVE A PLAN IN MIND!
WE'LL ANCHOR ON THE LEE SIDE OF THE ISLAND. I HAVE WHAT WE'LL NEED IN THIS SEA-CHEST!
CLOTHES FOR YOU, MY PRETTY--AND MAKE-UP FOR US BOTH!
THAT NIGHT, AS THE TROPIC MOON RISES OVER THE PALMETTOS...
I KNOW WHY I'M TO DON THIS FANCY GOWN--
--A SPANISH WOMAN WAS SLAIN ON SAN TOMAS AND HER GHOST IS SAID TO HAUNT ITS SANDS!
BUT WHY DO YOU NEED THE PHOSPHORUS?
YOU'LL SOON LEARN, JOANNA!

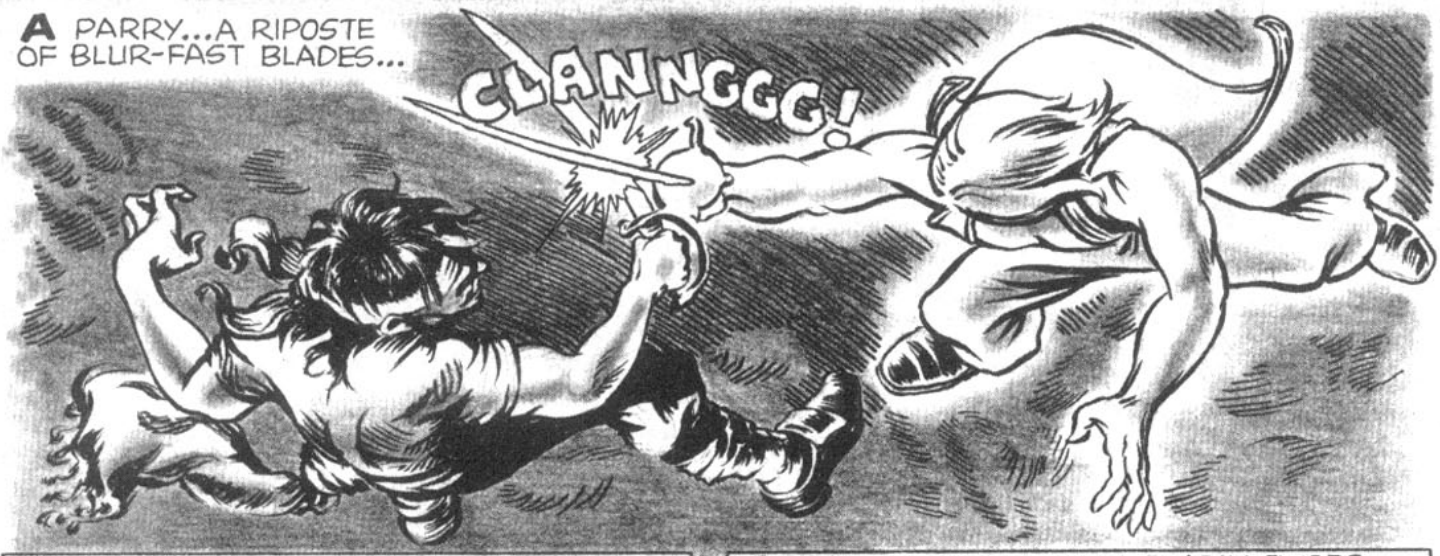
NOT FAR AWAY, THE BUCCANEERS ARE SWALLOWING JAMAICA RUM AND ROARING SEA CHANTIES, WHEN SUDDENLY...
HAVE YOU COME TO KEEP ME COMPANY?
POOR CLARISSA! POOR CLARISSA! NOBODY VISITS HER SINCE SHE WAS STABBED HERE AND LEFT TO DIE!
WHAT'S YON?

BESIDE THAT FEMALE APPARITION APPEARS ANOTHER...
LOOK THERE! IT'S THE CAPTAIN!
DEAD AND DROWNED! COME BACK TO HAUNT US!

PALSIED BY TERROR, THE SEA-ROVERS STAND PARALYZED AS...
I CURSED YOU, SWABS!
NOW I'VE COME BACK FROM A WATERY GRAVE TO SEE YOU PUNISHED!
I'LL BREAK YOUR NECKS AND SEND YOU INTO THE FIRES OF HELL!
FLINTLOCK PISTOLS ROAR, BUT CAPTAIN SKULL SOMERSAULTS LITHELY OUT OF THE PATH OF THE BULLETS...
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAMM!
YOU SCURVY RATS COULDN'T HIT THE HULL OF A FORTY TON FRIGATE AT ANCHOR!
THUDDD!
WHAKKK!
THEN--THE NIGHT SWALLOWS HIM UP, LEAVING TERRIFIED SEAMEN TO BABBLE IN SUPERSTITIOUS FEAR...
HE AIN'T HUMAN NO MORE! OUR BULLETS WENT RIGHT THROUGH HIM!
BLAST ME TIMBERS! HE'LL DO FOR US ALL!
HE'LL COME BACK--TO FINISH US!

ONLY THE WOLF--LEADER OF THE MUTINEERS--SHOWS ANY COURAGE...
AFTER HIM, YE SWABS!
HIM AND HIS ACROBATIC TRICKS! THAT'S HOW HE ESCAPED YOUR BULLETS!
HE'S REAL, I TELL YOU--REAL! SO GO INTO THEM WOODS AN' KILL HIM!
ONE BY ONE THE BUCCANEERS SET OUT INTO THE ISLAND FOREST...
NO MATTER WHAT WOLF SAYS--THE CAP'N IS A GHOST!
AND TWO-BY-TWO THEY FALL VICTIM TO CAPTAIN SKULL AND JOANNA...
WHONKK!
SWOTT!
ZONK!
UNTIL ONLY THE WOLF IS LEFT TO STALK THE ISLAND SHORES...
HE'S GOT TO BE HERE--SOMEPLACE!
WITH HIM GONE I'LL HAVE THAT SPANISH BEAUTY ALL TO MYSELF!
AROUND A BEND...
FOUL SCUM! COME PLAY YOUR BLADE WITH MINE!...
...AND DIE ON ITS POINT FOR THE MUTINOUS DOG YOU ARE!

STEEL RINGS AS THE WOLF HURLS HIMSELF AT HIS LEADER...
I'LL CHOP YOU INTO GOBBITS!
CLANNNGG!
BAG OF WIND! ALL YOU CAN DO WITH A SWORD...IS TALK ABOUT IT!


A PARRY...A RIPOSTE OF BLUR-FAST BLADES...
CLANNGGG!

BACK...BACK...BACK GOES THE WOLF FROM THE METALLIC MAGIC OF THE DARTING BLADE THAT CONFRONTS HIM...
YE'VE NEVER FACED SUCH A SWORDSMAN YE MANGY CUR!
IT'S A FINE FENCING LESSON I'M GIVING YOU--YOU MAY LAY TO THAT!

A BEAT...A BIND...AND A DEADLY SWORD-POINT FLASHES PAST A FALLEN GUARD...
BUT IT'S THE LAST LESSON YOU'LL EVER HAVE!
BECAUSE THIS IS YOUR FINISH!

OVER THE FALLEN WOLF, CAPTAIN SKULL AND JOANNA STARE AT ONE ANOTHER...
I'VE A CREW TO ROUND UP, JOANNA. THEY'VE LEARNED THEIR LESSON IN MANNERS...
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I KNOW NOT WHO I AM, CAPTAIN SKULL... MY HERO... BUT I HAVE A FEELING DEEP WITHIN ME THAT WE ARE BOUND TO ROAM THE SEAS... FOREVER!
The END

NOT EVEN INFERNO CAN HOLD THE DAMNED SOULS OF THE MOST FEARSOME PYROMANIC PARTNERS IN HORROR THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN! THE NIGHT ITSELF SHRINKS BEFORE THEIR CONSUMING BREATH! HELPLESS HUMANS MELT INTO ASHES IN THEIR BLAZING EMBRACE! NO WEAPON CAN RESIST THEIR SEARING STRENGTH! THE EARTH AND ALL IN IT WILL NOT SLEEP EASY NIGHTS FROM NOW ON! FOR THE FIREBRANDS HAVE ESCAPED...
THE FURNACE OF HELL

TWO GLISTENING LIKE PALE FISH EMERGING FROM THE BLACK WATERS OF BUZZARD'S CAPE, TWO SWIMMERS CLIMB THE STEEP BLUFF CONFRONTING THEM LIKE A FORBIDDEN WALL...
STILL WANT TO GO THROUGH WITH IT, CELIA?
YOU CAN'T SHAKE ME, NORM!
IF YOU LOSE YOUR NERVE WE CAN ALWAYS SWIM BACK TO THE VILLAGE, CELIA? JUST SAY THE WORD!
I'M STAYING! TO THE END! NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS!
THERE'S THE HOUSE! BLACK AND SILENT AS A TOMB!
AHEAD LOOMS A SINISTER PILE OF STONE EXHUDING AN AURA OF DREAD...
YOU CAN'T FRIGHTEN ME! ANYMORE THAN THE SUPERSTITIOUS TALES OF FEARFUL VILLAGERS!
CELIA! THE SALTY TANG OF SEA AIR HAS VANISHED? SOMETHING HAS TAKEN ITS PLACE!
I SMELL IT TOO, NORM! SOMETHING-- EVIL!
CELIA-- LOOK!
I--I DON'T BELIEVE IT! OUR IMAGINATION IS PLAYING TRICKS ON US! TH-THERE'S NO SUCH THING!

THOU ART FOOLHARDY INDEED TO VENTURE INTO THE REALMS OF THE FORBIDDEN!
AYE!
BACK TO THE WATER!
THEY'RE BREATH IS SCORCHING!
RECKLESS INTRUDERS! DARING TO SEEK US OUT IN OUR DOMAIN OF DARKNESS!
NOW- THOU WILT PAY THE SUPREME PENALTY FOR TRESPASSING!
T THE FIERY EMBRACE OF THE BLAZING APPARITIONS...
TH-THEY'RE LIVING FIREBRANDS!
MY SKIN-- BURNING OFF!...

AS THE HAPLESS COUPLE IS ENVELOPED BY THE FLAMING FIGURES IN A SEARING EMBRACE...
WE DIDN'T MEAN TO TRESPASS-- L-LET US GO!
H-HAVE MERCY--PLEASE? WE'RE ONLY HUMAN!
NO MERCY WAS SHOWN US!
AYE! NO MERCY! NO MERCY AT ALL!

LIKE FIERY HUMAN TORCHES PLUNGING THROUGH SPACE HEADLONG TOWARDS THE DARK WATERS...
HAVE PITY! Y-YOU'RE BURNING US UP ALIVE!
IS THERE NO PITY IN YOUR SOULS?
NONE! WE HAVE NO SOULS, THY CRIES FALL ON DEAF EARS!
MY HEART'S TURNING TO BURNT EMBERS!
AYE-- JUST AS WE WERE CONDEMNED TO LIVING HELL!

THE SEA HISSES WITH STEAM FROM THE DEMONIAC HEAT AS THE FIERY FIGURES SCORCH A VOLCANIC PATH THROUGH THE FROTHING WATERS...
WE WILL NEVER LET THEM GO!
AYE! VENGEANCE WILL BE OURS!
AHHHNNGG-

NOT EVEN THE COLD WATERS OF THE AFFRIGHTED SEA CAN EXTINGUISH THE UNQUENCHABLE FIREBRANDS!
NONE WHO ARE HAPLESS ENOUGH TO SEE US AS WE REALLY ARE WILL LIVE TO REVEAL OUR DREAD SECRET!
THIS MAID IS TOO COMELY! BEFORE SHE ATTRACTS EDWIN'S INCONSTANT HEART SHE WILL BE LOATHSOME CHARRED FLESH AND BLACKENED BONES!

THE BLACK WATERS PART BEFORE FIERY FACES...
AS LONG AS HEAVEN WILL NOT ADMIT US--
NOR HELL-- ITSELF--!
WE WILL TURN THE WORLD INTO A HOLOCAUST!
AND ALL WHO DWELL IN IT-- INTO ASHES!
WE WILL MAKE THEM PAY! AS WE HAVE PAYED!
AYE! THE CENTURIES ARE ON OUR SIDE! OUR FLAMES BURN BRIGHT! FED BY UNQUENCHABLE VENGEANCE! FOR WHAT THE RACE OF MAN HAST DONE TO US--WE WILL DO TO THEM!
DAWN APPROACHES! HURRY! WE MUST RETURN!
BUT WE WILL EMERGE AGAIN! AND AGAIN! AND AGAIN!
DAWN--ON THE BROODING BOSOM OF THE SINISTER SEA, AS FISHERMEN RAISE THEIR NETS...
MY GOD! LOOK! A SIGHT TOO HORRIBLE FOR ANY HUMAN EYE TO BEHOLD!
HURL THEM BACK! THEY'RE CURSED! THEIR FATE WILL BE VISITED ON US!
NO-- WE CANNOT! THEY WERE HUMAN-- ONCE! WE MUST BRING THEM BACK TO SHORE TO BE BURIED! OR OUR SLEEP WILL BE HAUNTED BY THEM FOREVER!

LATER, AS THE FEARFUL FISHERMEN RETURN WITH THEIR CHARRED CATCH...
THIS AIN'T A SIGHT FOR A WOMAN! 'TIS THE WORK OF THE DEVIL!
WHO BUT THE DEVIL COULD CAUSE SWIMMERS TO BURN IN THE COLD SEA?
RUN FROM THIS HORRIBLE SIGHT, MISS!
NO! THE DEVIL DOESN'T EXIST! EXCEPT IN THE HEARTS OF MEN!
NOT TOO LONG AGO, IN THIS VERY SEA, MEN BURNED THEIR BROTHERS. ACCUSING MEN AND WOMEN OF BEING WITCHES AND WARLOCKS! THAT WAS THE DEVIL'S WORK! I'M HERE TO WRITE ABOUT THOSE POOR LOST SOULS! INNOCENT OF WRONG-DOING!
SUPERSTITION BREEDS FEAR! ONLY THE TRUTH CAN SET US FREE! I AM GOING TO SEEK TRUTH BEHIND THIS HORROR! I WON'T REST TILL I FIND IT! I HAVE A SPECIAL REASON!
AT THE VILLAGE RAMSHACKLE BOOKSTORE... A LIVELY VISITOR...
THERE'S AN OLD BOOK ON THE BURNING OF WITCHES IN SALEM AND HEREABOUTS! WRITTEN ON THE SPOT BY AN EYE-WITNESS! WITH LIFE-LIKE DRAWIN'S OF THE CONDEMNED! CALLED BURN WITCH--BURN! YOU'RE WELCOME TO LOOK FOR IT!
THANK YOU!
BUT--AFTER POURING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINOUS PILE OF DUSTY BOOKS...
MY EYES ARE BURNING FROM LOOKING THROUGH THESE DUSTY BOOKS! I'LL COME BACK LATER AND CONTINUE MY SEARCH! BUT-- IT LOOKS HOPELESS!

AS THE GRAVEYARD MIST ROLLS ACROSS THE VILLAGE THE TROUBLED MAID LEAVES...
THE PEOPLE ARE SILENT! NO ONE WILL ANSWER MY QUESTIONS -- AS IF THEIR MOUTHS WERE NAILED BY FAIR! NO ONE WILL ANSWER MY QUESTIONS HERE! I MUST GO ELSEWHERE! AWAY FROM THE SUPERSTITION STRANGLING THIS TOWN!

MAKING HER WAY ALONE PAST CRUMBLING TOMBSTONES...
I READ AN ACCOUNT OF WITCH BURNINGS THAT SAID TWO CORPSES WERE BURIED IN UNHALLOWED GROUND, OVERLOOKING THE SEA -- NEAR WHERE?

ATTRACTED TOWARD A LONELY SPOT OVER WHICH THE WIND WAILS LIKE A WEEPING WOMAN...
THAT ABANDONED DOUBLE TOMBSTONE --
I WONDER IF THAT'S THE GRAVE SHUNNED BY ALL WHO PASS THIS WAY?

SURROUNDED BY THE DANK FOG LIKE A ROTTING BURIAL SHROUD...
THE INSCRIPTION MIGHT REVEAL WHAT I SEEK?
NO --!
NO USE -- I CAN'T MAKE OUT THE INSCRIPTION!

SUDDENLY -- THE BALEFUL FOG PARTS BEFORE THE STARTLED GIRL...
OHH --!
DON'T BE FRIGHTENED! I'M NOT A GHOST -- I ASSURE YOU!

PLEASE DON'T RUN! I DIDN'T MEAN TO STARTLE YOU!
I'M EDWIN BRAND-- I LIVE IN THAT BIG OLD HOUSE ON THE BLUFF!
I--I'M A STUDENT OF THE OCCULT... WITCHCRAFT... DEMONOLOGY...
WHAT'S A BEAUTIFUL GIRL LIKE YOU DOING OUT HERE ALONE?
SUDDENLY-- WITH BLOOD-STAINED TEETH... SATAN'S OWN EERIE CREATURE FLUTTERS AT THE TERRIFIED GIRL...
I'VE HEARD THAT FOLK TALE TOO! THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT! OPEN THE GRAVE AND EXHUME THE BODIES! BUT-- WHO'LL DARE DO IT?
I'M DOING RESEARCH ON THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS AND BURNINGS! ONE OF THE PAPERS I READ MENTIONED THAT TWO VICTIMS WERE BURIED IN THIS VICINITY? PERHAPS IN THIS GRAVE?
UGHHHHH-- A BAT! PLEASE--
PLEASE DRIVE IT AWAY FROM MY HAIR!
DON'T WORRY. I WON'T LET ANY HARM COME TO YOU!
THERE! IT'S FLYING AWAY! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT NOW!
OOOOOH-- IT SENT THE CHILLS RIGHT THROUGH ME!
HOW CAN I THANK YOU?
LIKE THIS?
I COULDN'T RESIST-- YOU'RE SO PRETTY! FORGIVE ME?
OF... COURSE...

MY LIBRARY IS FILLED WITH OLD VOLUMES ABOUT THE WITCH TRIALS IN THE VICINITY! PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO LOOK THROUGH THEM? AND THEN STAY FOR DINNER? MY HOUSEKEEPER, RITA BANE IS AN EXCELLENT COOK!
RITA BANE? THAT'S ODD? MY NAME IS BARRIE BANE-- I WONDER IF WE'RE RELATED? I'LL ASK HER.
INSIDE THE HOUSE ON THE HILL...
I HOPE YOU'RE HOUSE-KEEPER WON'T MIND?
OF COURSE NOT. SHE LOVE'S COMPANY! IT'S LONELY OUT HERE!
...HOODED EYES STARE BALEFULLY AT THE APPROACHING COUPLE...
RITA--MISS BANE IS STAYING FOR DINNER AFTER SHE USES THE LIBRARY!
MR. BRAND TOLD ME YOUR NAME IS BANE TOO! PERHAPS WE'RE RELATED? THROUGH SOME ANCESTOR?
I'D BETTER START DINNER!
I--I WONDER WHY YOUR HOUSEKEEPER DIDN'T ANSWER ME?
DON'T MIND RITA-BARRIE-- SHE'S A LITTLE ECCENTRIC! BUT SHE IS A MARVELLOUS COOK! YOU'LL SEE! NOW HELP YOURSELF TO THE BOOKS HERE!

FROM AN ADJACENT ROOM—VOLCANIC FIRES SEETHE INSIDE THE HOMICIDAL HOUSEKEEPER, AS...

LATER,,, AFTER PERUSING VOLUME AFTER VOLUME...

NOTHING HERE I HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE!
OHHH-- I'VE KNOCKED THIS PAINTING ASKEW! I'LL STRAIGHTEN IT BEFORE RITA SEES IT! SHE'S SURE TO THINK I'M CARELESS!

BARRIE IS STARTLED AT THE SUDDEN UNCOVERING OF,,,
WHY--THERE'S AN OLD BOOK HIDDEN IN A SECRET COMPARTMENT BEHIND THE PAINTING!
IT'S--BURN WITCH--BURN!
EDWIN BRAND PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN KNOW IT'S HERE!
I'LL TELL HIM ABOUT IT AFTER I LOOK AT IT!
INSTANTLY ENTHRALLED BY THE ELUSIVE TOME,,,
THE VILLAGE BOOKSELLER WAS RIGHT! THE EYE-WITNESS DRAWINGS ARE SO LIFE-LIKE--I FEEL AS IF I WERE ACTUALLY THERE--WHEN THE WITCH BURNINGS TOOK PLACE NEAR SALEM, AT BUZZARD'S COVE!
THE ABSORBED READER IS HYPNOTICALLY DRAWN TO THE SKETCHES OF THE PAST,,,
BARRIE FINDS HERSELF RE-LIVING THE AWFUL HAPPENING,,, AS IF SHE TOO WERE AN EYE-WITNESS TO THE FRIGHTFUL SACRIFICE TO COME,,,
"WARLOCK AND WITCH BURN FOR CASTING EVIL SPELLS!"
WARLOCK! THOU WILT NO LONGER BEWITCH THE INNOCENTS! YOU AND YOUR EVIL ALLY--THE WITCH BESIDE YOU!

HELL WILL NOT HOLD US!
EDWIN BRAND! RITA BANE! BURN WITCH--BURN! MAY YOUR SOULS ROT IN HELL!
WE WILL RETURN FROM THE FIRE TO AVENGE OURSELVES!
AYE! WE WILL RISE FROM OUR OWN ASHES TO CONSUME THEE ALL!

AND A SEARING THOUGHT BLAZES THROUGH THE READER'S HEART—
EDWIN BRAND --RITA BANE?-- THE SAME NAMES AND FACES OF THE TWO WHO LIVE IN THIS HOUSE! AND I'M ALONE WITH THEM!

IN NAMELESS TERROR BARRIE FLEES,,,
IT-IT'S SO DARK! TH-THE FOG IS S-SO COLD!
I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE BEFORE THEY REALIZE I'M GONE!

SUDDENLY,,,THE GLOOMY DARKNESS GLOWS WITH INFERNAL FIRES,,,
WH-WHAT'S THAT STRANGE GLOW C-COMING FROM THAT GRAVE?

BEFORE THE HORRIFIED FUGITIVE CAN WILDLY TURN AWAY—SHE IS CAUGHT IN A SEARING EMBRACE!
THE SCREAMING GIRL IS CONSUMED LIKE A FRAGILE MOTH DROPPING BY A TONGUE OF FIRE!
RITA BANE? THE WITCH WHO WAS BURNED AT THE STAKE? NO-- NOT YOU--
AYE! IT IS I! COME TO CHANGE THY PRETTY FACE!
IN BLACKEST NIGHT FOREVER MORE
MY FLAME BURNS BRIGHT--
I AM HELL'S FIRE-BRAND!
RITA! WHAT HAST THEE DONE? IS THERE NO END TO THY JEALOUSY WHICH CONSUMES THEE HOTTER THAN ANY FLAME-- EVEN NOW?
NO, EDWIN! THAT IS MY CURSE! AS THINE IS TO BE JOINED TO ME FOREVER! TO LIVE BY DAY AMONG THE INNOCENTS! UNDETECTED! AND TO ROAM THE NIGHT AFIRE!
THOU WILT NOT STOP ME FROM SEEKING MY PLEASURE WITH A PRETTY WRENCH, RITA! GO THINE OWN WAY!
THE FLAMES HAVE JOINED US, EDWIN! WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED! OUR WAY IS ONE! TO RISE FROM OUR SMOULDERING ASHES AND SEEK VENGEANCE ON ALL WHO FALL INTO OUR HANDS!
"THUS THE MOST SCORCHING COUPLE TO ESCAPE FROM THE FURNACE OF HELL— TO SET UNWARY HUMANS ABLAZE! — THE FIREBRANDS!"
THE END ... FOR THE MOMENT!
THE END

IT ***RAINS*** OUTSIDE THE WINCHESTER MEMORIAL HOSPITAL... RAINS IN A ***TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR*** THAT THREATENS TO ***DROWN*** THE SMALL SEA-PORT VILLAGE OFF THE COAST OF ***CAPE COD*** -- FRANK GOETHE ***CARES NOT*** ABOUT THIS ***RAIN***... HE HAS OTHER, ***MORE IMPORTANT THINGS*** TO CONCERN HIMSELF WITH AT THE ***MOMENT***... LIKE A ***PREGNANT WIFE*** ABOUT TO ***GIVE BIRTH*** AT ANY SECOND...

HOSPITAL

RAMÓN TORRENTS.72

...AND SO STARTS OUR TALE ...

... WITH A ***PREMATURE LOOK*** AT THE BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE NEXT DAY'S LOCAL NEWSPAPER... WHICH ***READS:***

– from THE WINCHESTER DAILY CITIZEN

GOETHE – Frank and Vanessa are pleased to announce the birth of seven sons, Edgar, Harold, Joseph, Peter, Steven, Vincent and Wallace, and of four daughters, Annabel, Anthia, Gloria and Ramona, 4 pounds in total, on February 29, 1972, at the Winchester Memorial Hospital. All well, and our sincere thanks to Dr. Grum-Whyte, for delivering our first-born.

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

DOCTOR... DOCTOR... IT'S ***TIME!***

QUICKLY THEN... THE OPERATION ROOM IS ***CLEARED AND WAITING*** FOR YOUR WIFE!

HAVE ALL THE ***PREPARATIONS*** BEEN MADE?

CERTAINLY... THIS IS AS IMPORTANT A BIRTH TO ***ME*** AS IT IS TO ***YOU!***

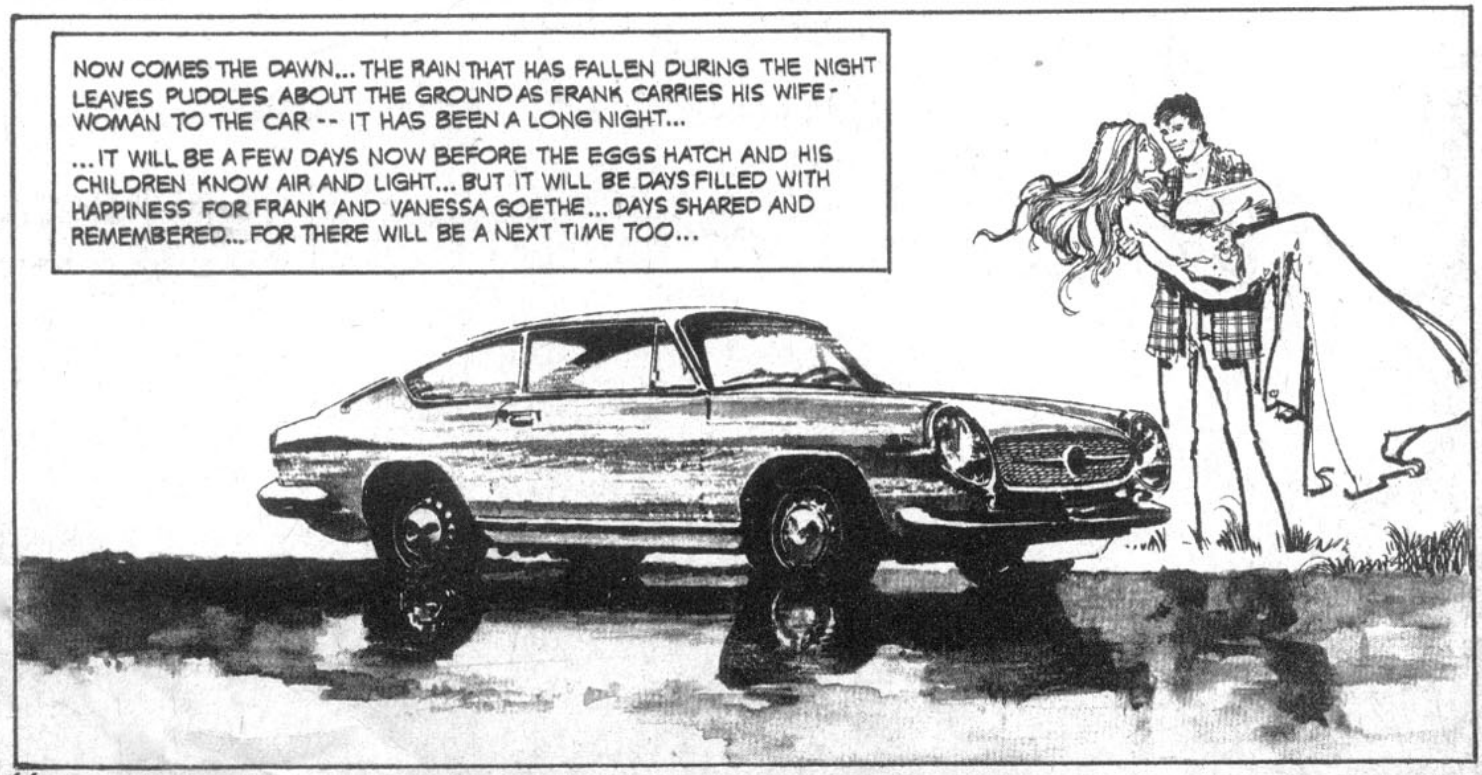
I WOULDN'T ***DREAM*** OF TAKING ANY ***CHANCES... OF COURSE*** EVERYTHING IS READY!

FRANK -- YOU'VE ***ALREADY*** DONE ALL YOU ***CAN***... GO OVER TO THE ***VALLEY PUB*** AND HAVE ***A DRINK***...

...I'LL SEND SOMEONE OVER WHEN YOUR WIFE ***DELIVERS***...

I CAN JUST SIT HERE FOR HOURS GETTING DRUNKER AND DRUNKER...
...WHAT'S THE POINT? IF I CAN'T BE OF USE AT THE HOSPITAL I MAY AS WELL JUST SIT HERE AND DRINK!
NO... THAT'S NOT RIGHT... WHEN VANESSA IS READY TO DELIVER SHE'LL NEED ME WITH HER...
...WHAT GOOD WILL I BE TO HER IF I'M IN A DRUNKEN STUPOR!
I'LL WALK...
...SO IT'S A BAD NIGHT -- NOT TO ME IT ISN'T -- TO ME THE RAIN IS SYMBOLIC...
CLEANSING THE WORLD FOR THE ARRIVAL OF MY FIRST BORN --
-- I WONDER HOW VANESSA IS DOING -- IS SHE IN PAIN? IS THE DELIVERY GIVING HER ANY TROUBLE?
I PRAY TO GOD IT ISN'T... WE'D LIKE A LOT OF CHILDREN... IF THIS BIRTH GOES WELL THERE WILL BE OTHERS!
...OTHER RAINY NIGHTS WHEN I CAN JUST LET MY MIND WANDER AND DREAM OF THE FUTURE!
AND REMEMBER THE PAST... HOW WE MET... JUST A FEW MILES FROM HERE...
... I, THE SAILOR, ON SHORE-LEAVE FOR A FEW HOURS IN NANSACH HARBOR...
SHE, THE BEAUTIFUL, SWEET GIRL I FOUND AS I CHOSE TO SPEND MY TIME WALKING...
I'LL NEVER FORGET HER FACE THAT FIRST DAY... ALMOST FRIGHTENED AS I CAME UPON HER SWIMMING... IN THE NUDE...
... HA HAH... I'LL NEVER FORGET... NEVER...
... AND FROM THAT DAY ON... THANK GOD... SHE WAS MINE... MY WOMAN...
RAMÓN TORRENTS 72
BETTER BE GETTING BACK... IT'S BEEN HOURS...
... DR. GRUM-WHYTE MUST BE WONDERING WHERE I GOT TO!
DOCTOR I...
JUST IN TIME FRANK... CONGRATULATIONS...
... YOU'RE NOW A PROUD FATHER... COME AND SEE THE LITTLE ONES AND YOUR WIFE... THEY'RE WAITING FOR YOU IN THE RECOVERY ROOM...
HELLO LOVE... EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?
YES FRANK DEAR... EVERYTHING WENT WELL... DID YOU SEE YOUR YOUNG ONES YET?
NO... WHERE?...
HERE THEY ARE!
IN A BASKET?
... IT'S NOT JUST A BASKET... IT'S A SPECIAL INCUBATOR... KEEPS THEM WARM UNTIL THEY CAN GET HOME...
...YOU'RE WIFE IS READY TO GO HOME ALREADY -- IN A COUPLE OF MINUTES SHE'LL BE DRESSED...

THANK YOU DOCTOR... WE APPRECIATE ALL YOU'VE DONE...
...NOT AT ALL MY BOY... IT'S BEEN MY PLEASURE -- MY DISTINCT HONOR AND PRIVILAGE TO HAVE MADE THIS DELIVERY...
...I HOPE ALL GOES WELL AT HOME -- IF THERE IS ANYTHING FURTHER I CAN DO I'LL BE ONLY TOO HAPPY... AND REST ASSURED THAT THE HOSPITAL STAFF WON'T TELL A SOUL...
HOW DO YOU FEEL VANESSA?
JUST FINE DOCTOR...
...FINE AND PROUD!
RAMON TORRENTS. 72


NOW COMES THE DAWN... THE RAIN THAT HAS FALLEN DURING THE NIGHT LEAVES PUDDLES ABOUT THE GROUND AS FRANK CARRIES HIS WIFE - WOMAN TO THE CAR -- IT HAS BEEN A LONG NIGHT...
...IT WILL BE A FEW DAYS NOW BEFORE THE EGGS HATCH AND HIS CHILDREN KNOW AIR AND LIGHT... BUT IT WILL BE DAYS FILLED WITH HAPPINESS FOR FRANK AND VANESSA GOETHE... DAYS SHARED AND REMEMBERED... FOR THERE WILL BE A NEXT TIME TOO...

PABLO
MARCOS